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CROSS-CURRICULAR TASKS IN PREVOCATIONAL EDUCATION: GATEWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT?

Submitted by

Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin

for the degree of Ph.D.
of the University of Bath

2001

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine issues relating to the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in initial vocational education from the perspective of students and teachers with the intention of identifying implications in relation to educational leadership, pedagogy and assessment/certification procedures. The research attempted to identify conditions in schools that were conducive to cross-curricular tasks making a significant contribution to the empowerment of young people. The research was in the form of an instrumental case study focusing on three schools. Data analysis was carried out in accordance with Grounded Theory inductive coding techniques.

The impact of cross-curricular tasks on the empowerment of students depended particularly on contextual conditions. The quality of school ethos, leadership of principals and co-ordinators, student/teacher relationships, attitudes to assessment and links with other social systems appeared to be the main conditions that influenced the self-esteem of students and their sense of community. The expertise of teachers was the principal factor influencing the impact of cross-curricular tasks on students' capability to think more critically for themselves and in increasing their employability. The empowerment of students is enhanced by educational leadership informed by a value system based on an appreciation of the human worth of individuals and the importance of a sense of community. The case study showed that there is an urgent need for teacher educators in Ireland to address specific pedagogical deficits in relation to facilitating experiential learning and to promoting integrative teaching and formative assessment of student learning. The empowerment process in initial vocational education is seriously undermined by a certification system that places young people at a major disadvantage in proceeding to further education or to a form of employment where they can continue to learn how to learn.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Senior Certificate

> *We're not stupid just because we didn't take Leaving Cert. You all think we're thick. Well, we're not! We chose to take these new courses because they were more interesting and we thought they would be more useful* (Smith 1987:23).

So said Milly (not her real name), a seventeen year old young woman, at an international conference in Limerick, Ireland in November 1986 to mark the end of the second series of European linked pilot projects on the transition of young people from school to adult life. The conference organisers had arranged for four young people to inform the conference about their experiences in following a new prevocational course called Senior Certificate. There were fears that the young people might feel intimidated if they were brought into the conference just before they were to speak. So it was arranged for them to act as part of the conference staff distributing documents, handing around the portable microphone and other chores. As a result they were present for the entire conference. They had prepared their scripts in consultation with their teachers beforehand and they delivered them quite efficiently if rather blandly. Then Milly asked if it would be in order for her to make a statement on behalf of herself and her three companions. She told the conference that they had been listening to what the participants had been saying for the previous two days. The four of them had got the clear impression that the conference participants seemed to think that anyone who did not take the Leaving Certificate in Ireland was stupid and they wanted to show that was not necessarily the case.

After a shocked silence some members of a rather chastened audience began what turned out to be a very lively dialogue with the young people. The exchanges revealed that

the young people in question had found the prevocational course, Senior Certificate, to be a great improvement on what they had previously experienced in school.

> *Before, subjects were irrelevant, now all subjects are relevant. This course has given me more confidence, said one.*
>
> *We aren't afraid to go to school, we look forward to it, said another.*
>
> *I am learning more during this year than during any other year at school and it's a great experience for me* (Smith 1987:23).

They were very critical of their previous experiences at school. Members of the audience suggested that it might have been their own fault in that they might not have collaborated with their teachers. One of the young males on the panel reacted rather impatiently to comments about teachers:

> *...if they respect and treat us like adults, then that's how we'll behave, but if they treat us like children* ...(Smith 1987:24).

Janet Smith, who acted as the conference rapporteur, reported that the audience was not only impressed with what the young people had said, but with the confidence with which they said it.

> *Rarely are young people given the opportunity to present their experiences and their views to delegates at a formal conference, just as they are rarely asked formally for their views about the educational provision of the school. The young people invited to the Limerick conference may have been atypical in that they had all been through Senior Certificate Courses, had all been on work experience and had found school to be worthwhile and fulfilling, but in all other respects they were average 17 year olds. Yet their ability to make the conference delegates sit up and listen to what they had to say was remarkable. These were young people for whom education had worked. They were confident, they were articulate, they were polite, but they were not afraid*

to say what they thought (Smith 1987:23).

But had education worked for them? They appeared to have been empowered to a certain extent, but they were disadvantaged in that that the credentials they received in the form of the Senior Certificate had a very limited currency within the formal education system or in the labour market. This is the dilemma facing educational providers generally. How can young people be empowered whilst gaining the credentials necessary for them to progress through the formal education system? This is a dilemma that I have personally wrestled with since I became principal of a comprehensive school in the mid-1960s. The reports of the external evaluator together with the internal evaluation reports on the Senior Certificate were very positive and presented evidence that confirmed the impression of empowerment given by the students at the Limerick conference (Gleeson 1990b). The Senior Certificate was developed at the second stage of the SPIRAL project on transition from school to adult life that I directed at Shannon Curriculum Development Centre (1983-1987). In July 1983 Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey said that the project aimed to develop an alternative route to national certification for young people, who did not wish to follow existing programmes. She expressed the hope that it would be possible to develop modes of assessment compatible with the kind of learning experiences appropriate for people in transition from school to adult life (Gleeson 1990b).

A total of 1240 students from over 50 schools sat for Senior Certificate examinations in 1987. The majority of the students followed a programme made up exclusively of Senior Certificate courses while a minority combined one or two Senior Certificate courses with subjects from the traditional Leaving Certificate programme.

Table 1: **Senior Cycle Programmes 1985-1994**

Name	Leaving Certificate	Senior Certificate	Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT)	Transition Year Option (TYO)
Duration	2 years with possibility of repeating	2 years	1 year	1 year
Content	Minimum of 6 from wide range of traditional subjects.	7 programmes of integrated studies, taken as totally alternative curriculum or as individual programmes within context of Leaving Certificate or TYO.	3 main elements: vocational preparation, voational specialisms and general education.	Curriculum designed by individual schools.
Currency of Qualification	Entry to Third Level based on total points for performance in 6 subjects.	Entry to apprenticeships and further vocational education and training courses.	Entry to apprenticeships and further vocational education and training courses.	N/A.

1.2. Leaving Certificate Applied

Over a six year period (1987-1993) there was an ongoing debate about the possible national dissemination of the Senior Certificate programme. It was proving to be very difficult to incorporate the flexible assessment procedures operational in the context of the Senior Certificate into the more rigid Leaving Certificate system. Eventually the decision was made to design a new work-related prevocational programme incorporating the Senior Certificate and existing one-year vocational preparation and training (VPT) progammes under the name of Leaving Certificate Applied. The new programme was 'ring-fenced' in that people taking it were not allowed to combine it with subjects of the established Leaving Certificate. It was envisaged that the freedom to explore a wide range of innovative assessment procedures

compatible with the type of learning experiences considered important for the period of transition between school and work would be sufficient recompense for the limiting nature of the 'ringfencing' (interview with Jim Gleeson 28 July 1999). It was hoped that the inclusion of the words Leaving Certificate in the title of the programme would give it a certain status.

Table 2: **Senior Cycle Programmes 1995-**

Name	Leaving Certificate	Leaving Certificate Vocational	Leaving Certificate Applied	Transition Year Option (TYO)
Duration	2 years	2 years	2 years	1 year
Content	Minimum of 6 from wide range of traditional subjects.	Minimum of 6 from wide range of traditional subjects plus 3 work-related modules.	40 modules plus 9 cross-curricular tasks.	Curriculum designed by individual schools.
Currency of Qualification	Entry to Third Level based on total points for performance in 6 subjects.	Entry to Third Level based on total points for performance in 6 subjects plus 3 work-related modules.	Entry to apprenticeships and further vocational education and training courses and to national police force.	N/A.

The Irish Department of Education and Science had set itself a target of keeping 90% of the population in full time schooling up to the age of eighteen by the year 2000. The main strategy to achieve the target was the expansion of the senior cycle of second level schooling by providing two additional forms of the school Leaving Certificate: i.e. Leaving Certificate Vocational and Leaving Certificate Applied. The Leaving Certificate Vocational was simply a grouping of existing Leaving Certificate courses together with the addition of three link modules, Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience. The Leaving Certificate Applied was introduced to a limited number of schools on an exploratory basis in September 1995. The White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*, described the Leaving

Certificate Applied as "a separate and distinct form of the Leaving Certificate" (Ireland 1995:52).

Leaving Certificate Applied differs from the other two forms of the Leaving Certificate fundamentally. It is modular whereas the other Leaving Certificate programmes are comprised of two-year courses. It is semesterised in that the two year programme is divided into four segments with ongoing assessments at the end of January and May each year. It is cross-curricular in that students are required to carry out a number of cross-curricular tasks on topics that aim to enable young people to relate what they are learning in the modules to their own life experiences. (Students were required to complete nine cross-curricular tasks during the period being studied, 1995-1997. The number of cross-curricular tasks was reduced to seven in 1998.)

The assessment and certification of Leaving Certificate Applied was based on the following principles:

- *Assessment criteria to be transparent;*
- *Students to accumulate credit during the programme;*
- *The centrality of Student Tasks to the nature of the Leaving Certificate Applied;*
- *External examination to incorporate a wide range of techniques.* (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:8).

Student performance was recorded in three modes: module completion, externally assessed cross-curricular tasks and external written examinations. At the end of each half-year session students received one credit each for the satisfactory completion of a maximum of 10 modules. The satisfactory completion of a module was credited on the basis of completing specific key assignments and being in attendance for at least 90% of schooldays. Individual performance in Student Tasks (cross-curricular) was assessed by external assessors according to specific criteria. At the end of Year 2 students took external examinations,

organised by Department of Education and Science, in the following areas:

- English and Communications;
- Vocational Specialisms (2);
- Mathematical Applications;
- Languages and
- Social education.

A student accumulated a maximum of 100 credits. Credits were allocated in the following manner:

- *Satisfactory completion of 40 modules (one credit per module):* *40 credits*
- *9 Tasks graded as follows: 3 distinction; 2 merit; 1 pass:* *27 credits*
- *External examinations* *33 credits* (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:8).

The Leaving Certificate Applied was a single award on the basis of the number of credits accumulated over the four half-year sessions.

The Leaving Certificate Applied will be awarded at three levels

Pass *60 credits*

Merit *70 credits*

Distinction *85 credits* (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:9).

Leaving Certificate Applied is 'ring-fenced' in that students are not permitted to combine parts of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme with parts of the other two Leaving Certificate programmes and progression to further education is limited to one

designated route.

> *The fundamental goal of the Leaving Certificate Applied is to prepare students for the transition from school to adult and working life, including further education* (Ireland 1995b:52).

Leaving Certificate Applied is a work-related curriculum. Students were required to complete a total of forty modules during the two-year programme, that is ten modules each half-yearly semester. The modules are grouped in three categories:

- vocational preparation and guidance;
- vocational specialisms and
- general education.

There were not any stated entry requirements but it was presumed that participants would have reached the age of fifteen years. The majority of participants were adolescents who, in one way or another, were becoming marginalised from mainstream schooling. By opting for Leaving Certificate Applied they had, in the words of the Department of Education, become 'ring-fenced' that is they had limited themselves to one narrow progression route to further education.

1.3. Cross-curricular Tasks

The Student Task in Leaving Certificate Applied was defined as

"a practical activity by which learning is applied to the development of a product, the investigation of an issue or the provision of a service" (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 1.1).

The task was described as having "a key role to play in providing a vehicle for curriculum integration in the context of a modular curriculum" (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 1.3). Jim Gleeson, who was the

leader of the Leaving Certificate Applied design team, said that the tasks were introduced primarily to offset the dangers of fragmentation and lack of coherence in a modular programme.

> *It was primarily about trying to get over fragmentation in a theoretical way.*
>
> (interview with Jim Gleeson 28 July 1999).

The tasks were organised under the three main categories of the curriculum: vocational preparation, vocational education and general education. During the period covered by this case study (1995-1997) each student was required to complete a total of nine tasks over the two-year period i.e. three from each element. In the Vocational Preparation category students were required to investigate specific issues from the perspective of as many courses as possible. There was a specific direction that in the case of the Vocational Education category the tasks should originate in a vocational specialism and should include Mathematical Applications, Information Technology (where relevant) and as many other courses as possible. In the General Education category, students were advised to focus on contemporary issues at local, national and European levels.

The guideline regarding the length of time to be spent working on a task was rather vague. Each task was to take at least ten hours excluding the time spent preparing the report. Students were free to decide whether they did an individual task or a group task.

There were eight stated goals:

The goals of the Student Task are to:

- *develop students' confidence and self-esteem;*
- *promote student motivation by providing short-term achievable goals;*
- *develop student responsibility and initiative as well as skills in self-evaluation, problem-solving and management;*
- *enable students to apply to practical problems the knowledge, understanding, skills and*

competences developed by participation in the modules;

- *provide an opportunity for participating students to integrate modules from separate courses and to appreciate their relevance to practical problems and issues;*
- *promote co-operation and team work among participating students;*
- *encourage and facilitate team work on the part of the teaching team;*
- *promote school/community liaison through involvement with the local community*

(Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 2).

The stated goals suggest that the curriculum designers were more inclined to a functional type of integration where the learner viewed knowledge as a resource to be used for the promotion of integrative experiences (Ingram 1979). The major emphasis of the stated goals was on the personal development of the students and the social dimension of the learning. The following criteria were laid down in relation to the identification of an appropriate task:

- *The task must involve the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and competences arising from the courses being taken in the relevant element.*
- *The task must involve the integration of as many courses as possible in addition to the course from which the task originates.*
- *The task should normally take each student at least ten hours to complete (excluding the report).*
- *In the case of the group tasks the contribution of each individual must be identifiable so as to enable assessment of task performance for each student.*
- *The task should be designed so as to ensure that maximum recognition will be given for student participation and practical outcomes.*
- *The task should be designed to facilitate the application of the report structure and*

assessment criteria (Department of Education National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 6).

The design team does not appear to have had any particular preference for a group task as recommended by Waks (1997).

We would have seen both as having a role to play – the individual tasks from the point of personal responsibility and so on – the group tasks from the point of teamwork. We would not have preferred one to the other, but we would have seen it as terribly important that both could be accommodated (interview with Jim Gleeson, 28 July 1999).

The Guidelines relating to the planning of tasks dealt with task identification, time management, teacher's role and community involvement (Department of Education National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 3).

The planning was to be directed by a team of teachers, working with a co-ordinator. Students were to be involved actively in the selection of tasks. Two aspects of time management were stressed. One dealt with the management of the task within the time scale of a half-year semester that is, either September to January or February to May, the other dealt with the provision of sufficient time for the development of the teaching team. The need was stressed for a deadline to be set on which students would be clear as to what particular tasks they were doing in a particular semester. There was an obligation on teachers that sufficient time was set aside during the semester for students to complete the task and to finalise the report. There was a reciprocal onus on the students to complete the work during the allotted time.

The teachers were required to supervise the tasks, to facilitate students in identifying other modules that could contribute to the task and in "ensuring that students are given the support necessary to achieve as much integration as possible" (Department of Education National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b:

Section 3).

The leader of the design team saw integration at two levels.

> *I saw integration at two levels – at the level of getting teachers to work together around common themes and topics from their subject perspective and secondly from the point of view of young people*
>
> (interview with Jim Gleeson, 28 July 1999).

The planning guideline also recommended that the local community should be involved and that the tasks should be put on public display when finished.

1.4. Assessment Issues

The Guidelines made a very clear distinction between the assessment of the task performance and the assessment of the report on the task. The assessment of the task itself was to be based on the following headings: quality; evidence of enterprise and initiative; creativity; participation and practical application. The assessment of the report on the task was to be based on the following: clarity of purpose; effectiveness of action plan; effectiveness of communication; extent of integration achieved; understanding of concepts and self-evaluation. The assessment criteria were not spelt out in the 1995 Guidelines because it was planned at that time that there would be a pilot phase during which participating teachers from different schools would be engaged in the cross-moderation of tasks. It was envisaged that performance criteria for three levels Pass, Merit and Distinction would be developed during the pilot phase. That did not happen due to circumstances outside the control of the design team.

The developmental stage of the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum was never properly completed. The design team was working under the direction of a steering committee, organised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The Minister

for Education appointed the chairperson of the committee, who was the owner of a successful chain of supermarkets. The other members of the committee represented all the major vested interests in second level education in the country. The work of the committee was seriously undermined by a protracted discussion about the issue of teacher-based assessment. The leader of the design team was convinced that teacher-based assessment was the only feasible way to assess the cross-curricular tasks.

> *I think that, allowing for the importance of teamwork, co-operation and the other generic skills that were central to task completion, we felt there was no other way that these could be assessed. We felt that the teacher in situ was the only person who could keep a record of each individual's input. Because it was prevocational education and because these transferable skills were so important we could not see any other way that they could be monitored* (interview with Jim Gleeson, 28 July 1999).

The position was very confused for two reasons. While the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was responsible for designing the curriculum, the assessment and certification procedures were within the remit of the Department of Education and Science. On the other hand the two teacher unions that were represented on the Steering Committee were divided. The Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) was in favour of teacher–based assessment provided teachers were paid for the extra work involved, while the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) was opposed in principle to the idea. The latter union argued that teacher based assessment would undermine teacher/student relationships. After a long protracted discussion the proposed teacher-based assessment procedures were abandoned and the Department of Education devised a system of external assessment.

The breakdown in negotiations regarding teacher-based assessment had a negative effect on the development of the Leaving Certificate Applied. The proposed pilot phase,

mentioned in the 1995 Guidelines, with performance criteria being developed based on the experience of participating teachers and on the cross-moderation of Student Tasks across schools did not happen. As a result it appears that the design team never had the opportunity to think through the actual format of the most appropriate assessment procedures and related issues such as the forms of integration envisaged.

> *It was the principle of teacher-based assessment that kept being debated. That took up an enormous amount of time and then finally it was all for naught so that I suppose we never really got into great detail on the actual implementation of school-based assessment* (interview with Jim Gleeson, 28 July 1999).

Gleeson also admitted that there had not been any in-depth discussion about integration at the design stage.

> *Certainly it was a little examined concept. You know integration was something that you could not be against, no more than motherhood or apple pie* (ibid.).

To be fair to the design team it is extremely likely that these issues would have been discussed in depth if the proposed pilot phase had gone ahead as originally planned. Such are the hazards of curriculum development!

To confuse matters further another industrial relations dispute, unrelated to Leaving Certificate Applied, between the teacher unions and the Department of Education in June 1995 led to the Minister announcing that the introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied that had been planned for September 1995 was postponed until September 1996. However, the dispute was settled in August 1995 and the Minister announced that Leaving Certificate Applied would be introduced on a trial basis in September 1995.

Twenty-three of the seventy-eight schools that were authorised to introduce the programme did not do so as the principals said that the necessary planning for such a major innovation had not been satisfactorily done. A Support Service, jointly managed by Shannon

Curriculum Development Centre and the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee Curriculum Development Unit, was appointed in August 1995 to provide support, including an in-career development service, for the teachers involved in implementing the programme. As Executive Chairman of Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, I acted as joint manager of the support service from its establishment in 1995 until my retirement in July 1999.

1.5. Prevocational Education

Leaving Certificate Applied is typical of the prevocational curricula developed in most Western countries in the last quarter of the twentieth century with a section on preparation for work and vocational guidance, a section on vocational education and training and a section on general education. While cross-curricularity is a common feature, the inclusion of cross-curricular tasks that are assessed regularly as part of a national system of assessment and certification was a major innovation to second-level schooling in Ireland. Major controversies regarding prevocational education have occurred in different countries (Gleeson 1987; 1990a; Korndorffer 1991).

On the positive side, Pring presented a rather idealistic view.

> *First, it accepts continuity between what is taught and the experiences that the students bring with them to school. Learning is a matter of building on that experience, reflecting on it and refining it. Second, the purpose of education includes vocational training, but it is much more than that. It has a moral purpose, enabling students to develop a set of defensible values that will sustain them when life gets tough, encouraging the interests that will enable them to enjoy their leisure time profitably, providing the guidance and counselling which will enable them to find the appropriate routes into further education, training and employment* (Pring 1995:79).

He spelt out specific criteria for any prevocational curriculum. It should have relevance to the vocational needs of the participants. It should provide progression to further education supported by adequate guidance and counselling. It should attach importance to learning styles, particularly to the practical modes of learning. It should emphasise technology, particularly Information Technology. It should give priority to personal exploration and encourage the use of the creative arts to do so. It should develop the skills necessary for personal effectiveness, particularly communications and numeracy skills. It should create community consciousness, economic and political awareness and stress the importance of teamwork. It should promote equal opportunities and contribute to the formation of moral attitudes (Pring 1995).

Pring warned of the need to respect the thoughts and feelings of the learners no matter how limited they may appear to be to the teachers.

There is a danger of failing to see that everyone, even with limited intellectual capacity... can, within their own capacity, be liberally educated. It is not a matter of people being educated or not educated – there are no absolute standards for being tagged an educated person. People are either more or less educated (Pring 1995:128).

In an inspiring passage Pring provided what could be described as a charter of good practice for all teachers. He argued that being human was everybody's privilege. Each person is entitled to think, to have feelings, to form relationships and to have aspirations for the future regardless of their intellectual capabilities. Education must respect people's thoughts, feelings and aspirations and the contexts in which they are living and in which they will be working in the future.

> *And that requires bringing the educational ideal to the vocational interests of young people, educating them through their perception of relevance, helping them to make sense of their social and economic context, enabling them to be intelligent and*

questioning in their preparation for the world of work (Pring 1995:190).

The Preamble to the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme Outlines reflects the sentiments expressed so eloquently by Pring:

> *It is essential that the talents of all pupils are recognised and that they be afforded an opportunity to develop in terms of responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge. ... In the interests of equity it is important that the various needs of students at the post-compulsory stage of education are provided for. ... The Leaving Certificate Applied focuses on the needs and interests of students, using a variety of methodologies, making optimum use of resources of the local community and paying particular attention to the needs of the local region* (Department of Education National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:2).

In a review of prevocational education, Atkins (1989) presented both sides of the debate. The arguments on the positive side claimed that prevocational education had extended the range of opportunity available to young people; had enabled a higher proportion of people remain in formal schooling; had permitted a coherent scheme of skill training to be provided for those best suited for it; had provided a second chance for those who had experienced difficulties at school at an earlier stage; had enabled young people's educational deficiencies to be diagnosed and remedied; and had broken down the traditional division between education and training by maintaining a balance between specific vocational training and broader general education.

Atkins (1989) presented two main arguments on the negative side. Prevocational education was second class education and it was misconceived in a society of structural unemployment. It was claimed to be second-class on three grounds, as a transmitter of culture, in the structure of the curriculum and in the content of the courses provided. As a transmitter of culture it was charged with being an agent for the economic and cultural

dispossession of people, who were already disadvantaged, with a view to creating a malleable, docile workforce. It was also argued that prevocational education indoctrinated young people in capitalist values.

There were six criticisms of the structure of the curriculum. It was a means of freezing undesirables out of mainstream education. Integrated courses were an inferior currency in the world of education. There were not any integrated courses at third level. Participants were selected on the basis of scholastic tests without any reference to possible constraining factors. Participants were precluded from access to jobs with real economic power. Teacher-based assessment further distorted the unequal distribution of power between teachers and pupils. The content of the courses with the emphasis on knowledge and skills related to everyday life had been condemned as a "new barbarism" on the basis that it deprived participants of the knowledge available to the dominant groups in society (Atkins 1989:143). Prevocational education was also criticised for forcing young people to adopt middle-class instead of working-class values.

In relation to structural unemployment, Atkins (ibid) reported that it was claimed that the emphasis on waged employment as the desired status symbol without adequately dealing with unemployment encouraged the development of a guilt complex on the part of young people who had difficulty in getting a job.

Gleeson (1989) re-echoed some of the negative arguments presented by Atkins. The low status given to prevocational education was an obstacle to participants when they applied for employment.

> *In the wider society pre-vocational courses have the stigma of being second rate* (Gleeson 1989:75).

There was a danger of participants in prevocational education being identified with disaffected youth.

> *... if prevocational education is to have any impact it is essential that it should attract a cross-section of all young people, and not become a 'sink' subject for disaffected youth* (Gleeson 1989:75).

There were not any clearly defined gateways to employment in place for participants in prevocational education.

> *Equally it would seem important to generate careers for those encouraged to take them up via prevocational education, rather than as at present, leaving this side of the equation to the vagaries of the market mechanism (*Gleeson 1989:75).

Young (1998) claimed that while pre-vocational programmes in England and Wales highlighted the academic/vocational divisions and the problems of progression generated by it, they exacerbated the problems rather than solving them. He argued in favour of a unified curriculum for 14 -19 year olds "with a new and more connective role for subjects for all students, integrated with the experience and understanding of the world of work"(Young 1998:52).

The conflicting arguments present major dilemmas for people with responsibility for the development of prevocational curricula. One of the difficulties is the occlusion of the interests of the young people directly involved, who are a weak vulnerable section of the community, by a plethora of conflicting issues raised by powerful vested interest groups that have quite different agendas (Saunders 1991; Wellington 1994). There is need for on-going rigorous evaluation of prevocational curricula in the interests of the young people involved. Social justice demands that young people are protected from the dangers inherent in the negative charges outlined above.

1.6. Purpose of the Research

Wragg (1997:95) compared the curriculum to "an endlessly changing, infinitely variable kaleidoscope" of many dimensions. In his model of the cubic curriculum, he identified three particular dimensions, subjects, cross-curricular issues and teaching/learning styles. Morrison (1994) claimed that cross-curricular learning could be a major means by which individual and collective empowerment could be realised. Cross-curricular learning in the form of Student Tasks is an integral part of Leaving Certificate Applied. The purpose of this research is to examine a number of issues relating to the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in Leaving Certificate Applied in 1995-1997 from the perspective of the students and teachers primarily with the intention of identifying implications in relation to educational leadership, pedagogy and assessment and certification.

1.7. Overview

In Chapter Two, I describe the methodology and my own role as a participant researcher. In Chapter Three I attempt to set the development of Leaving Certificate Applied in the context of the evolving relationship between academic and vocational education in Ireland during the twentieth century. In Chapter Four, I attempt to clarify my own assumptions based on a literature review and on my own experiences both as a curriculum developer and a school principal over a period of more than 20 years. In Chapter Five, I consider the manner in which the consequences of cross-curricular tasks were influenced by three kinds of conditions, causal, intervening and contextual. In Chapter Six, I identify the differing consequences of cross-curricular tasks in the three case study schools. In Chapter Seven I examine the empowering dimensions of cross-curricular tasks and identify the implications in relation to educational leadership, pedagogy and assessment/certification procedures.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1. Introduction

The research methodology was in the form of a case study. There were four main parts in the case study – the clarification of issues, the gathering of data, the analysis of data and the writing of the report. The issues, which I brought to the research, derived initially from my experience as a school principal and as a curriculum developer informed by a literature review. Those issues, which Stake (1995) would describe as *etic issues,* remained in a state of flux until data gathering had been completed and the data analysis had reached an advanced stage. They were revised a number of times in the light of ongoing data analysis. Clarification of issues, data gathering and data analysis appear to have been interacting with one another during the course of the research. My final statement of *etic* issues was influenced considerably by what students and teachers had been telling me during interviews.

2.2. Role of Researcher

My role in this research is that of participant observer. For three and a half years of the research I was joint manager of the Support Service that had been commissioned by the Department of Education, Dublin, to support schools that were

implementing cross-curricular tasks in the context of Leaving Certificate Applied. I have difficulty in clarifying for myself my role as a researcher. In considering the five possible researcher roles listed by Stake (1995) I identify myself with a number of them. I see my main function as researcher/interpreter attempting to recognise and substantiate new meanings of potential relationships between cross-curricularity and empowerment. I also see myself as researcher/teacher, who is anxious to pass on to my former colleagues in the Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service and to the principals and teachers, with whom I was working, any new insights that I have developed in relation to the research question. I also see myself as researcher/evaluator as I have been endeavouring in the course of the research to identify examples of good practice and the contextual conditions in which they occurred. I also see myself as a researcher/advocate, as I have been personally committed to the promotion of cross-curricularity for more than 30 years as a school principal and as a director of a curriculum development centre. I have tried to focus myself on the role of researcher/interpreter, and to use any deviations to either the role of teacher or evaluator as complementary to the process of interpretation. I have attempted to limit my role of advocate, but I am fully aware that in a qualitative approach "the researcher ultimately comes to offer a personal view" (Stake 1995:42). I have limited my role as researcher/biographer to providing an outline sketch of the students involved in the case study in enough detail to show the diversity in a group of Leaving Certificate Applied participants.

2.3. Issues

The issues deriving from the research question are complex. The research does not attempt to unravel the contested concept, empowerment, but focuses on the

potential relationships between cross-curricular tasks and the three elements of Hodkinson's (1994) definition of empowerment. As a result of my own experience informed by the literature review, I formulated my theoretical assumptions as four generalisations, which I subsequently modified in the light of *emic* issues that emerged from the actors in the case. The *etic* issues related to my assumptions regarding the relationships between cross-curricularity and the empowerment of young people, while the *emic* issues related to the effect of three different sets of conditions, causal, contextual and intervening, on the implementation of cross-curricular tasks as described by the actors involved.

2.4. Case Study

It was an instrumental case study in that it was focusing on issues rather than on the schools in question (Stake 1995). Undoubtedly I was looking closely at each of the schools involved, but I was particularly interested in identifying contextual conditions that impinged on relationships between cross-curricular tasks and the empowerment of young people.

The primary aim of the study was to clarify the perceptions of 23 students, who were participating in Leaving Certificate Applied, regarding cross-curricular tasks. The focus was on their perceptions because it is vitally important that the views of the participating young people are heard in all the debates about curricula.

> *Young people are not, of course, oblivious to these debates and discussions. Closer attention needs to be paid to their views and aspirations. Educators accustomed to expression, find it difficult to listen, to inform themselves. Youth tends to feel that education is not preparing them for their future, whether in the narrower or the broader sense* ...(Skilbeck et al. 1994:20).

The evidence of teachers and school principals, which was used initially for triangulation purposes, made a significant contribution to the research. It became evident at an early stage that their views were critical to get a balanced picture of what was happening in schools, provided that I did not allow them to drown the voices of the young people.

2.5. Participating Schools

It was a collective case study in that it focused on different schools in different types of location in different parts of the country. The three schools on which the case study is based were selected from the 53 schools that introduced the Leaving Certificate Applied programme for the first time in 1995. The following criteria were used as a basis for the selection: location; type of school; size of school; gender of students. The schools have been given the following names in order to protect their anonymity, Inner-city Girls, Market Town Coed and Rural Coed.

Inner-city Girls is in a disadvantaged area in the centre of a city. Market Town Coed is located in a small town with a population of about 6000 people. Rural Coed is standing on its own in a rural catchment area where the largest centre of population is less than one thousand five hundred. Three different types of second level schools were included in the case study. Inner-city Girls is a secondary academic school owned by a religious order and governed by a board of management. Market Town Coed is a vocational school owned by the local authority and governed by a board of management. Rural Coed is a state community school, governed by a board of management.

The schools ranged in size from a student population of 700 to 355. The secondary academic school, Inner-city Girls, was the largest and the vocational

school, Market Town Coed, was the smallest. Market Town Coed and Rural Coed are both co-educational. Inner-city Girls is an all-girls school. The principals knew me as the joint manager of the Support Service that was established by the Department of Education to provide support for schools that were implementing the Leaving Certificate Applied. I telephoned them and explained that I was carrying out research on the implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied with a particular focus on the perceptions of the young people involved. The three principals reacted very positively and promised their full co-operation. I then sent a formal letter to the principals confirming that the research would be conducted and I requested written confirmation of their permission. The principals co-operated with me in circulating a document to the parents of students involved describing the research and a form of consent to be signed by them. I undertook to take all reasonable precautions to protect the anonymity of the participants.

2.6. The Data

The principal source of data was a series of taped interviews with a number of individual students. Students were selected for interview on the basis of intellectual capacity as indicated by Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices and on gender balance in co-educational schools. 23 students representing a broad range of ability were interviewed – eight from Market Town Coed, eight from Inner-city Girls and seven from Rural Coed.

Interviews with the students took place in November 1996, December 1996 and April 1997. I had already sent letters to their parents asking them to sign a form confirming their consent to their daughter/son "participating in a research project related to Leaving Certificate Applied" (Appendix 1). On my second visit to the

schools I invited the Leaving Certificate Applied students to take a series of objective tests and they co-operated fully with me. I used the objective tests for two purposes:

- To establish the level of diversity in each group and
- To select interviewees that reflected the level of diversity in each group.

On my first meeting with each interviewee I assured her/him that I was not an inspector of any kind, but that I was genuinely interested in hearing her/his honest opinions about cross-curricular tasks. The first interview was deliberately unstructured and I took very few notes as I did not want to inhibit the interviewees. All the students spoke quite freely to me and each of them gave me permission to tape subsequent interviews. The second and third interviews were semi-structured but I allowed them to lead me into whatever area they wished to talk about (Appendix 2). Three school principals and fourteen teachers were interviewed in May 1997 as a form of triangulation exercise (Appendix 3). Their evidence proved to be quite illuminative. Data from the interviews were supplemented by casual conversations with a variety of teachers during visits to the schools during 1996, 1997 and 1998. Data was also collected in a survey I conducted of students, teachers, parents of students, and employers in the catchment areas of the case study school (see Section 6.7.6.).

Many informal discussions with Jim Gleeson, who designed the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum, have been very helpful. In July 1999 I conducted a formal interview with him about the design of the curriculum with specific reference to cross-curricular tasks and integration (Appendix 4). I have had many helpful informal discussions about Leaving Certificate Applied with my colleagues on the Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service since the introduction of the

programme in 1995. In August 1999 I conducted a formal interview with Sheila O'Driscoll, my successor as joint manager of the service, about the implementation of Leaving Certificate Applied in schools generally (Appendix 5). I have also used as data published reports by the Department of Education and by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

The regular meetings I had with members of the Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service and participation in meetings of teachers and principals in various types of in-career development activities have influenced my views, but I have not considered it ethical to use notes or reports on such meetings as data. I was a member of a committee organised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to review Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum in 1997-98. While I believe it would not be ethical for me to use records of meetings of the committee as part of this research I gained insights on the implementation of Leaving Certificate Applied from being present at the discussions.

Participation in a two year transnational research project, Promoting the Attractiveness of Vocational Education (PAVE), under the auspices of the European Union Leonardo Survey and Analysis programme (Trant 1999) was also helpful as it gave me an opportunity of discussing the implications of my research in an international context.

2.7. Clarifying the Research Question

Stating issues and formulating research questions was a long drawn-out experience. As the research aimed specifically at the perceptions of the young people involved I had decided on a qualitative approach from the beginning. I began the study with a conceptual framework, based on my own assumptions informed by my professional

experience and my initial review of the literature. During the data gathering stage I was working on the basis of the following three issues.

Issue A: The Student Task is a form of curricular integration based on the self-perceived needs and interests of the participants that provides an effective introduction to adult learning.

Issue B: *The Student Task facilitates students to gain access to a broad base of knowledge and to develop their abilities for employment and economic life.*

Issue C: *The Student Task, informed by experience based learning, leads to a learning environment that is fundamentally different from that usually existing in second level schools in Ireland.*

I kept the issues under review in the light of the ongoing analysis. In due course I added a fourth issue.

Issue D: *The role of the Student Task in addressing the perceived problems of status facing a prevocational education programme.*

The questions that I compiled for interviews with the teachers were based on the above issues (Appendix 3).

As time went on, it was becoming clear to me that the issues as I had identified them were not really in tune with what the young people had been telling me. My assumptions understandably appeared to me to reflect more the perspective of a curriculum developer than that of a Leaving Certificate Applied student. I finally restated the issues in the form of the following research question that was the result

of an interweaving, over a two-year period, of my original assumptions with the fruits of the ongoing analysis.

What conditions in particular second level schools are conducive to the implementation of cross-curricular tasks that make a significant contribution to the empowerment of young people engaged in Leaving Certificate Applied?

For the purposes of this study I decided to take Hodkinson's (1994) holistic model of empowerment with its three overlapping characteristics:

- personal effectiveness,
- critical autonomy and
- community.

Hodkinson (1994) described empowerment as a contested term that meant quite different things to people at different points of the ideological spectrum from the far right to the far left. The Hodkinson model is an amalgam of different ideological positions. He defined personal effectiveness as "the ability to do things for oneself" (Hodkinson 1994:498). His concept of critical autonomy derived from "a combination of liberal education and the concerns of critical theorists" (Hodkinson 1994:499). He described it as being "primarily concerned with helping young people to think for themselves" (ibid). His concept of community was closely related to the critical theorists' view of social citizenship incorporating the duality of a person as an individual and as a member of community. Hodkinson (1994) claimed that the concept of community was essential to a holistic view of empowerment.

> *I simply claim that both the individualistic and communal forms of empowerment must be addressed, for in practice we live both* (Hodkinson 1994:501)

.Based on the Hodkinson model, I propose to take the following as indicators of empowerment:

- participants' personal effectiveness;
- participants' ability to think for themselves;
- participants' greater awareness of the interdependence of people and communities.

Individual effectiveness appears to be made up of two elements, an enterprising attitude and a particular level of basic skills and competencies. Enterprising people are described as those who have the ability "to be proactive and to initiate activity rather than to rely on someone else either to take action on their behalf or to tell them what to do" (Hodkinson 1994:499).

While it is desirable that a person is proactive, s/he cannot be very effective if s/he has not the necessary skills to do whatever is required to be done. At the end of the twentieth century an effective person needs skills in communication, the application of number and information technology (Dearing 1996). Other necessary skills include planning, decision-making, time management, social skills, reflective skills, self-appraisal skills and the ability to seek help when required.

Collaborative effectiveness also demands the combination of an enterprising attitude and a particular level of social skills in different contexts such as the home, the school, the local community and the workplace. All the skills that are necessary for individual effectiveness are also important to varying degrees for collaborative effectiveness depending on the extent to which they can be applied in a group

situation.

In the context of initial vocational education two dimensions of personal effectiveness are particularly relevant, the level of self-esteem of the participants and their employability. Feelings, based on a person's capacity to appreciate one's attributes and particularly one's unique worth as a human being while realistically accepting one's shortcomings, provide a firm foundation for personal effectiveness. Due to the centrality of work in people's lives and the volatility of the labour market at the start of the 21st century an individual's personal effectiveness depends to a considerable extent on her/his ability to take responsibility for managing her/his own employability.

Consequently I am dividing the research question into three sub-sections.

> *What contextual conditions in secondary schools in Ireland are conducive to cross-curricular tasks making a significant contribution to the empowerment of young people engaged in initial vocational education in the form of Leaving Certificate Applied by contributing to:*
>
> - *their personal effectiveness through increasing their self-esteem and their employability;*
> - *their ability to think for themselves and*
> - *their awareness of the interdependence of people and communities?*

2.8. Grounded Theory

2.8.1. Reason why

When I had most of the data gathered I participated in a workshop where I raised the question of my unease that my a priori theoretical assumptions were inhibiting the emergence of concepts from the data. I was advised to consider Grounded Theory

procedures as a means of facilitating the views of the actors to emerge from the data in their authentic form. My decision to use Grounded Theory procedures was particularly influenced by the statement by Miles and Huberman (1994) that "of these inductive coding techniques, one of the most helpful is that of Strauss (1987), described best in Strauss and Corbin (1990)" (p.158).

I was aware of the weakness of introducing grounded theory in the middle of the research, as I had not been guided in collecting data by ongoing open coding as recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1990). I was reassured to learn that while many contributors to Bryman & Burgess (1994) stated that they had followed Grounded Theory, there were doubts as to whether it had been applied by any of them in its entirety (p.220). Bryman and Burgess (1994) claimed that Grounded Theory had alerted qualitative researchers to "the desirability of extracting concepts and theory from data", and "had informed, in general terms, aspects of the analysis of qualitative data, including coding, and the use of different types of codes and their role in concept creation" (p.220).

In Grounded Theory procedures data are taken apart, conceptualised and put together again in new forms. The procedures are designed so as to enable the researcher build a theory in a scientific manner that will help her/him to break free as far as possible from her/his own biases and assumptions overt and hidden. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stressed the need for the usual canons of good science to be redefined in order to fit the realities of qualitative research and the complexities of social phenomena. They state that the analytic procedures of grounded theory were designed to:

- *build rather than test theory;*
- *give the research process the rigour necessary to make the 'theory' good*

science;

- *help the analyst to break through the biases and assumptions brought to, and that can develop during, the research process;*
- *provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents* (Strauss & Corbin 1990:57).

2.8.2. Open Coding

The coding process is based on two analytic activities, making comparisons and asking questions. Strauss & Corbin (1990) identified three major types of coding i.e. open, axial and selective. I propose to work with the definitions of the various terms used by Strauss and Corbin (1990) in dealing with the different types of coding.

The initial analytic procedure was open coding. It is defined as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:61). Concepts were identified by placing conceptual labels on discrete happenings, events and other phenomena. Each concept was then developed as to its properties and the dimensions of the properties. Classifications were developed through examining different concepts and grouping those that appeared to pertain to a particular phenomenon. In that way, concepts were grouped together so that a more abstract overarching concept emerged called a category. The individual concepts in each classification were then reorganised either as properties of the category in question or as dimensions of the properties. The dimensions of each property were expressed in terms of its position along a continuum. Open coding was a very slow process. It involved going through transcripts of interviews painstakingly line by line while focusing on the question, 'What is s/he telling me?'

At the open coding stage I believe that I did achieve, albeit inadvertently, open sampling as described by Strauss & Corbin in that I uncovered "as many potentially relevant categories as possible together with their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:181). My approach was purposeful in that I selected a cross-section of students based on intellectual capacity from each school. It was systematic in that I returned to the same people as far as possible for the second and third series of interviews. My approach was fortuitous in that I allowed the students in their initial interviews to talk about any aspects of Leaving Certificate Applied and cross-curricular tasks that they wished and I followed a semi-structured agenda for two further interviews on points raised by them.

When I began open coding I identified a large number of concepts, which I grouped together around what I assumed to be a phenomenon worthy of attention. I gave the phenomenon in question the status of category and linked the related concepts to it as properties or dimensions of properties (see Appendix 6). Some of the original categories grew in density as other categories became attached to them as sub-categories. The categories that did not live up to my earlier assumptions either became sub-categories or became peripheral to the research and were discarded. I found open coding very helpful with regard to triangulation exercises as differences and similarities in people's statements were highlighted by comparing memos or logic diagrams. I found logic diagrams most helpful in disciplining myself to conceptualise as much as possible.

2.8.3 Axial Coding

As I proceeded to accumulate more and more logic diagrams summarising open coding I was beginning to feel overwhelmed by the volume of material. However

certain events or happenings began to emerge as being more important to the interviewees than others. The identification of important events/happenings led me to introduce axial coding as connections were established between different categories through continuously making comparisons and asking questions.

> *Axial coding is a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between categories. This is done by utilising a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action / interactional strategies, intervening conditions and consequences* (Strauss and Corbin1990:96).

The two procedures work in tandem.

> *Though open and axial coding are distinct analytic procedures, when the researcher is actually engaged in analysis he or she alternates between the two modes* (Strauss & Corbin 1990:98).

There was a major difference between open and axial coding in relation to sampling. In the former I was sampling as widely as possible, whereas in axial coding the emphasis was on "relational and variational sampling" aimed at trying "to find as many differences as possible at the dimensional level of the data" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:185). I found that I was continuously alternating between open and axial coding as the analysis proceeded and certain categories began to draw in more sub-categories from data that were being coded for the first time or from data that were being revisited for checking or comparison purposes. It entailed an ongoing revision of codings as a result of continuous comparisons between different pieces of data and continuous questioning about the manner in which different categories related to one another and the dimensional differences of the properties of specific categories.

In axial coding I used the paradigm recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1990: 99).

The paradigm is comprised of six main elements:

(A) CAUSAL CONDITIONS > (B) PHENOMENON >

(C)CONTEXT > (D) INTERVENING CONDITIONS >

(E) ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES >

(F) CONSEQUENCES.

The first step in axial coding was relating a particular phenomenon to its causal conditions (see Appendix 7).

Phenomenon is the central idea, event, happening, incident about which a set of actions or interactions are directed at managing, handling, or to which the set of actions is related (Strauss and Corbin 1990:96).

Strauss & Corbin defined causal conditions as "events, incidents, happenings that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon"(*ibid.*).

Context relates both to the phenomenon and "to the particular set of conditions within which the action/interaction strategies are taken to manage, handle, carry out and respond to a specific phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:101). In comparing and contrasting the open coding of data from the three schools the impact of different contextual conditions became increasingly evident.

Action / interaction strategies have a number of properties. They are processual in that "they can be studied in terms of sequences, or in terms of movement or change over time" (Strauss and Corbin:104). Strategies are purposeful in that they are done for a specific reason. Failed strategies are as important as successful ones and the identification of reasons for failure can make a significant

contribution to the emerging theory. Intervening conditions always either help or hinder the implementation of strategies.

> *Intervening conditions are the broad and general conditions bearing upon action / interactional strategies* (Strauss and Corbin 1990:103).

I found that while contextual conditions changed from school to school intervening conditions tended to be more general.

In considering the consequences of particular action/interaction strategies it was necessary to be aware that what were consequences of strategies in one situation could be part of the conditions in another (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The parallel procedures of *open coding* and *axial coding* were repeated many times as the transcripts of the interviews with students and teachers were being analysed. Connections between categories were being continuously revised in the light of ongoing reflection and as a result of checking back repeatedly with the original transcripts (See an example of Axial Coding in Appendix 7).

2.8.4. Selective Coding

As the number of logic diagrams resulting from axial coding increased I became increasingly aware of the need to clarify for myself what was the core of the data. As a result I introduced selective coding. I compared and contrasted the logic diagrams relating to axial coding for each school in an attempt to move to a higher level of abstraction by articulating a common overarching concept for the case study schools.

> *Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement* (Strauss & Corbin 1990:116).

Selective coding was similar to axial coding in that I used the same paradigm i.e. phenomenon > causal conditions > contextual conditions > Action / Interaction strategies >intervening conditions > consequences.

For the remainder of the research I have combined selective coding with both open coding and axial coding repeatedly. The first step in selective coding involved the explication of the *story line,* that is the conceptualisation of the story being studied (Strauss & Corbin 1990). I considered a number of *story lines* before finally settling on one. As a prelude to explicating the story I followed the advice of Strauss & Corbin (1990) in attempting to tell in a few short sentences what I considered to be the essence of my story about cross-curricular tasks. The following is the one I finally accepted after rejecting a number of others.

> *The story was about the way that Leaving Certificate Applied students who were engaged in cross-curricular tasks appeared to take a more proactive part in their own lives under certain conditions. The personal approach of individual students appeared to depend on how motivated they were and how confident they were together with their level of communications and self-organisation skills. They appeared to be further influenced by the commitment of their teachers to cross-curricular tasks and the expertise of their teachers in areas such as inquiry based learning and experience based learning.*

Having considered the essence of the story and the summary memos, logic diagrams relating to both open coding and axial coding, I finally decided that *facilitating empowerment* was the most appropriate story line. It was at this stage that I completed my final revision of *etic* issues and finalised the research question. The sampling process in selective coding became increasingly discriminating as it focused on verifying the story line.

Finalising the story line took a lot of thought and soul searching as I had worked with different definitions of the central phenomenon or core category in the context of axial coding and selective coding during the preceding months. I had considered *Implementing cross-curricular tasks* as one possibility, *Raising the status of initial vocational education* as another and *Changing learning environments* as a third. Arguments could be supported by the data for all of them but I felt that the students' perceptions were best described in terms of empowerment. A strong case could have been made for *implementing cross-curricular tasks* or *changing learning environments* based on teachers' perceptions, and a strong case could have been made for *Raising the status of initial vocational education* based on the perceptions of school principals. These latter concepts appeared to me to be far removed from what I had been hearing from the students, who appeared to associate cross-curricular tasks especially with increased self-confidence, possible job opportunities and an opportunity to formulate opinions for themselves about matters relating to their personal lives and social issues. Consequently I accepted *facilitating empowerment* as the overarching concept or, in Grounded Theory terminology, as the core category for the entire research.

Having accepted facilitating empowerment as the story line I eventually began to finalise the selective coding paradigm around the core category, facilitating empowerment. On the basis of selective coding I developed a logic diagram incorporating all the relevant data (Appendix 8). This subsequently led to the formulation of the following tentative theory that was subsequently expanded and grounded in the data.

The implementation of cross-curricular tasks in Leaving Certificate Applied involves at least eight linked action/interaction sequences:

management of tasks;

inquiry based learning;

experience based learning;

applying communication skills;

applying self-organisational skills;

applying collaborative skills;

facilitating integration;

assessment procedures.

The contributions of the eight linked sequences to the empowerment of the participants differ in accordance with the different ways they were influenced by causal, intervening and contextual conditions impacting on them.

In Chapters 5 and 6 the theory regarding the influence of different types of conditions on the consequences of cross-curricular tasks is presented with the supporting evidence from the data. Before doing that it is necessary to consider developments in academic and vocational education in 20th Century Ireland. It is also necessary for me to clarify the assumptions regarding the theoretical relationships between cross-curricularity and the empowerment of young people that I brought to the research.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Different Contexts

The history of curriculum development at second level in the last seven decades of 20th century Ireland can be considered in three different diachronic contexts:

- The period 1930 to 1963 when there was a bipartite system of academic and vocational education in operation in second-level schools in Ireland;
- The period 1963 to 1977 when the Government was attempting to replace the bipartite system of academic and vocational schools with a comprehensive system of second level schools;
- The period 1977 to date when substantial European funding became available for the development of initial vocational education and training.

3.2. The Bipartite System

3.2.1. Church/ State Partnership

The centralist system had evolved in the nineteenth century under British rule in the form of a coalition between Church authorities and State administrators. The Church was happy to allow the administrators to administer the system as long as a Roman Catholic interpretation of the Classical-Humanist tradition prevailed in the schools. On the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 the system was taken over in its entirety by the native government. The only substantial change was the commitment to use the schools as the means of restoring the Irish language as the spoken language of the people. Apart from debate about the reality of the approach to the language question there appears to have been very little dialogue on educational issues.

3.2.2. Vocational Schools

Vocational education was introduced formally to Ireland in 1930. Prior to that there had been two main types of schools in Ireland primary (elementary) and academic secondary with only a small number of technical schools in urban centres supported by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. In 1930 the Vocational Education Act was passed by Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) to provide education that would continue and supplement what had already been provided in elementary schools and would include general and practical training in preparation for employment (O'Connor 1986a). The Vocational Education Act, passed in 1930, set up 38 vocational education committees throughout the state. The committees were charged with

establishing and maintaining a suitable system of continuation education that was defined as follows:

> *Education to continue and supplement that provided in Elementary schools, and includes general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades, manufacture, agriculture, commerce and other industrial pursuits* (Andrews 1974:37).

Committees were required to establish links with local employers and to adapt the courses in the continuation schools to the employment prospects of the locality. The vocational schools had a low status from the very beginning partly through pressure from the Catholic clergy (Lee 1989). Three types of courses were provided:

'Junior Technical'; 'Junior Commercial' and 'Day Trades Preparatory'.

There was not any general education provided in the early vocational schools. Practical subjects were supplemented with subjects such as Technical English, Commercial Arithmetic and Commercial Geography. One of the major difficulties expressed by officers of the Vocational Education Committees in the 1940s was the absence of any general qualifications for students leaving vocational schools that would help them to compete for positions for which they had been trained. In 1947 the Department of Education introduced the Day Vocational Group Certificate Examinations for students of vocational schools. There were five different groups of subjects: Manual Training; Rural Science; Domestic Science; Commerce (General) and Commerce (Secretarial). In each group there was a core of practical subjects to which could be added a selection of optional subjects. Irish and English were among the optional subjects listed for all five groups. In the 1950s, the Group Certificates had established

credibility as passports to employment or apprenticeships for their holders, who were generally aged sixteen or seventeen (Andrews 1974). The number of vocational schools had increased to more than two hundred and fifty by 1958. However, the Minister for Education of the day, Jack Lynch, admitted that the development of vocational education "was not yet complete in the sense that the general public, and in particular that section who would profit most, had not yet fully grasped the extent of the services available and the advantages to be gained ..." (O'Connor 1986a:27).

The vocational schools were rigidly separated from the academic secondary schools.

> *Neither the courses leading to the Intermediate or Leaving Certificates, nor the examinations themselves, were allowed in Vocational Schools. No senior cycle courses existed by which ambitious pupils may progress upwards through wholetime day education* (Andrews 1974:38).

3.2.3. Secondary Schools

The vocational schools were public institutions owned and managed by the democratically elected Vocational Education Committees whereas the secondary academic schools were privately owned. While the Catholic Church controlled 90% of secondary schools it did not show any particular interest in curriculum as such. It appears to have been happy with a curriculum organised in subjects and implemented in accordance with the classical humanist traditions. The Catholic church was the dominant force in Irish education from the foundation of the State in 1922 until the early 1960s. The second level teachers had no part in running schools. The teacher unions were very weak. The parents accepted

whatever the bishops said and the Minister for Education refused to take a leadership role (O'Connor 1986a).

Keen competition has long been a feature of academic education in Ireland as success in examinations has been recognised as the main gateway to further studies and to upward social mobility. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim that educational qualifications were a far more important determinant of status and power in post-colonial Ireland than in other countries with far greater indigenous industrial wealth. In the early years of the State, entrance requirements to the Civil Service appear to have dominated the work of secondary schools (Lee 1989:197). The competition for places in the public service and for university scholarships together with the publication of results locally ensured that terminal written examinations had a major influence on the curriculum of secondary schools.

Academic educational opportunities for the children of families that could not afford the small fees charged were confined to those who were sufficiently bright to gain one of a limited number of scholarships to the secondary schools. However through the efforts of the religious orders who provided academic education at a very low cost there was a higher level of participation in education by fifteen-year-olds in Ireland than in the United Kingdom in the 1950s (Coolahan 1981).

Very many who did not enjoy the benefits of secondary academic education emigrated mainly to the UK. Lee (1989:379) gives the astonishing statistic that "four out of every five children born in Ireland between 1931 and 1941 emigrated in the 1950s". Approximately 57,000 emigrated in the year 1956. Emigration appears to have been accepted with an extraordinarily

fatalistic complacency by the leaders of both church and state as the only solution to what would otherwise be a major unemployment crisis. The high level of emigration appears to have taken the pressure off Vocational Education Committees to implement policies relating to youth employment enshrined in the 1930 Act.

The Council of Education Report (1962) provides an interesting picture of secondary schools in the Ireland of the 1950s. There were many small schools: 72 with less than 50 students; 154 with between 51 and 100; 121 with between 101 and 150. There were only 133 schools with more than 150 students. It is against the background of the small school that the curriculum of secondary schools in Ireland of the 1950s must be assessed. Lee's main criticism of the curriculum was the neglect of science and modern languages.

> *As late as 1962-3 only 30% of boys and 14% of girls took a science subject in the Leaving Certificate. On the language side the combination of compulsory Irish and virtually compulsory Latin - 88% took Latin in 1962-3 - meant that few other languages were taught. A mere 21%, almost all girls, took French, and only a handful of pupils took any other European language. English thus remained the repository of the only living intellectual culture to which most Irish had access* (Lee 1989:131).

Seán Ó Catháin, who was Head of the Education Department in University College Dublin, stated that many teachers were very dissatisfied with the system (Ó Catháin 1958). They had three main complaints. The courses were too long. The pupils had too many subjects and as a result did not have sufficient time to cover any of them adequately. The form of the examinations demanded cramming rather than teaching. A London based group, Tuairim, published a

pamphlet in the early sixties, which was extremely critical of secondary schools in Ireland.

> *In practice, except in a very few schools, none of the so-called 'liberal' subjects is taught in a liberal or humanist manner... ... ...*
> *It is possible to complete the whole secondary school course and matriculate without ever having read a complete book* (Tuairim undated:7).

While there appears to have been little competition for places at university provided that parents had sufficient means to pay, there was intense competition for the limited number of university scholarships available. As a result of intense competition for places in the public service and for university scholarships, the low fee second level schools were very competitive while the elitist schools were more relaxed until the points system of university entrance was introduced. The Council of Education Report (1962) considered free secondary education "as being untenable, utopian, socially and pedagogically undesirable and economically impossible" (McCormack and Archer 1998:17). Their report reflects the public attitude that resulted in under investment in education at a time when other European countries were investing heavily. O'Connor describes his impression of the Council of Education as "a body satisfied with the system as it then operated and unwilling to consider almost any amendment" (O'Connor 1986a:69). The reluctance to think critically and creatively regarding the future of education can be ascribed to some degree to representatives of the churches who wished to protect the status quo. It also reflects the remnants of the dependency syndrome of a colonial people that

caused such a degree of intellectual inertia in Ireland of the 1950s (Lee 1989). Education was not a live political issue in Ireland at that time and as a result a form of "political paralysis appeared to permeate the entire Department of Education" (Tuairim undated:5).

3.3. Policy Change (1963 - 1977)

3.3.1. Influence of OECD

The 1960s were a period of major changes in Irish society with the introduction of planned programming for economic development, Vatican Two, the opening of a national television station and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland (Farrell 1998). Ireland's membership of the OECD was to prove to be a major force for change in the educational scene. The publication of Schultz's (1961) seminal work, *Investment in Human Beings*, coincided with an OECD conference in Washington DC at which Ireland was represented. The OECD wished to carry out a critical study of the entire educational system in a small country on an experimental basis and invited small countries to apply. The Irish government applied and a survey team was appointed, supported by OECD funding and expert advice. The work of the survey team was published in 1966 under the title Investment in Education.

3.3.2. Duggan Report 1962

In June 1962 an internal departmental committee (Coiste Scrúdaithe Oideachais Iarbhunscoile) was established under the chairmanship of Dr. Duggan "to consider the present position of post-primary education, particularly in its social aspects, and to make recommendations" (Duggan 1962:1). The committee was initially given twelve months to complete its deliberations but in fact had to report in December 1962. The Duggan report was in sharp contrast to the Council of Education (1962) report that had been published earlier in the same year.

> *We feel that the time is not only approaching but has in fact arrived when we can no longer allow traditional patterns to unduly influence educational planning and provision in a world where a social, political, economic, scientific and technological revolution has taken place and is still proceeding* (Duggan 1962:3).

The Duggan report described the low status of manual skills at the time of the passing of the 1930 Act. It stressed the need to "implant firmly in the minds of our people the idea that there is within the milieu of manual work a dignity and culture peculiar to itself and a direct access to mental satisfaction" (Duggan 1962:4).

The report recommended a period of compulsory post-primary education free of charge for all Irish children. It presented six arguments in favour:

- Post-primary education was recognised internationally as a means of social promotion;
- The development of native talent was of great importance to the state;
- Improved standards of living enabled families to forego the earnings of children for longer periods;
- Industrial developments create a need for more people with qualifications;
- The education system must reflect the needs of the economy.

The Duggan committee rejected any form of selection and cited the 'notoriety' of the 11plus in Britain as a vindication of its views. They were attracted to the idea of comprehensive schools but rejected them in view of the low density of population in most parts of the country. The committee understood that a comprehensive school required an entry of between 200 and 300 each year. The solution recommended by Duggan was a comprehensive

system.

> *This, to us, means that the distinction at present recognised between vocational schools and secondary schools should disappear, and that a common form of post-primary course extending over a three year period should be available both in existing vocational and existing secondary schools* (Duggan 1962:11*)*.

The Duggan Report proposed that post-Junior secondary school education would consist of a three-year course divided into three broad streams i.e. Liberal Studies; Science and Technology; Business and Management. There should also be a series of one-year pre-employment courses. It was recommended that young people following the three-year senior courses would be streamed according to ability.

3.3.3. Comprehensive Schools

On 20 May 1963, Minister for Education Patrick J. Hillery gave a press conference expounding the principle of equality of opportunity and announcing the introduction of comprehensive schools.

> *The new type of school I have in mind is a comprehensive Post-Primary day school. It would provide for children of age about 12-13 to 15-16 a three year course during which observation and tests would show with fair probability in which direction, academic or technical, each pupil's bent would eventually be. At the end of these three years in the Comprehensive section, the pupil would take the Intermediate Certificate Examination, which in any case, it may be necessary to amend in several ways. If he passed that examination he could, if he so wished, proceed to*

> *the Secondary or Technical course in accordance with his previous showing at the Comprehensive school and at the Intermediate Certificate Examination* (Barber 1989:49).

George Colley took over as Minister for Education in April 1965 and in the following month he announced that henceforth both secondary and vocational schools would provide common courses to the level of Intermediate Certificate, that is for 12 to 15 year olds. This was a major boost for vocational schools as up to that time the only progression route available to their students was through apprenticeship schemes.

In September 1966 three comprehensive schools were opened. Two involved the amalgamation of existing academic secondary and vocational schools, while the third was located in a new town in which there had not been any second level school previously. The curriculum combined academic subjects with what were described as 'hand and eye' subjects. The 'hand and eye' subjects were Woodwork, Metalwork, Home Economics and Art. The core curriculum consisted of Irish, English, Mathematics, one of the 'hand and eye' subjects, Civics, Environmental Studies, Music, Religion and Physical Education. In describing the comprehensive schools to the Dáil (the Irish parliament), the Minister

> *pointed out that they would not alone provide a service for the areas in which they were situated but, in addition, would give a lead in developing post-primary education, and would provide an appropriate setting for a proper beginning in vocational guidance* (O'Connor 1986a:97).

3.3.4. Negotiated Rationalisation

The Minister explained in 1966 that he did not envisage building a large number of comprehensive schools but that he aimed to provide a comprehensive curriculum in every locality through getting secondary and vocational schools to collaborate through pooling their resources. The Catholic cardinal welcomed the proposal and local meetings were arranged so that negotiations would begin between the various interest groups (O'Connor 1986a).

The rationalisation negotiations ran into trouble very quickly and the situation was exacerbated by the arrival in the summer of 1966 of a high profile minister, Donogh O'Malley, who had his own priorities. Without consulting the Finance Minister, he announced the introduction of free secondary education together with free transport for children who lived more than three miles from the nearest second level school. The negotiations regarding possible rationalisations continued slowly in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. An article in a Jesuit journal, Studies, in Autumn 1968 written in a private capacity by the Head of the Development Branch of the Department of Education, Seán O'Connor (1968), created a major furore. He suggested that the government had two aims i.e. equality of opportunity and responding to the aptitudes and interests of individual pupils. He described the comprehensive curriculum as embracing academic, scientific, practical and artistic subjects. He stressed that the three year period leading to the Intermediate Certificate examination was to be a period of observation during which pupils' aptitudes and abilities might be assessed with the support of the newly established psychological service of the Department of Education. The period of observation was modelled on the *cycle*

d'observation in Belgian schools. O'Connor complained that the demands of university entrance were narrowing the curriculum and denying adolescents access to liberal studies. He claimed that the over-emphasis on academic subjects by the universities was devaluing the comprehensive curriculum.

> *Because of the prestige of the university and because a very substantial number of Leaving Certificate pupils aspire to a university education, the Matriculation requirements excessively dominate the curriculum. There is little point in encouraging a potential university student to develop his interests and aptitudes if the subjects of his interest do not tally with university requirements* (O'Connor 1968:246).

O'Connor's article drew a very negative response from a spokesperson for the University side, Denis Donoghue, the professor of English at University College, Dublin. Donoghue poured scorn on O'Connor's suggestion that all subjects academic, technical, practical and artistic should have equal value for entry to universities.

> *I would be happy to read this as Mr. O'Connor's little joke, a sally of wit to enliven a rather dull occasion. But he goes on to say that sewing is the kind of thing he has in view. Sewing is part of the Domestic Science course for the Leaving Certificate he reminds us. Now sewing is an excellent skill, I yield to no civil servant in my respect for the girls or boy who can sew. Indeed, I think of sewing as commensurate with other skills which I value equally: mending punctures, snagging turnips, baking soda-bread, knitting socks. 'I could go on' as Mr. O'Connor says. So the universities are to accept such skills as having equal educational value with English, Irish, Latin, History, Mathematics and so*

> *forth. We are to treat them all as having equal significance as Matriculation* subjects (Donoghue 1968:285).

Barber (1989) perceived Donoghue's attitude to a comprehensive curriculum as being consistent with the general view within universities. He cited the subsequent tardy acceptance by the universities of technical subjects as evidence of this. He surmised that the universities had the power to transform post-primary education in Ireland if they had been willing to commit themselves to the development of a broad liberal curriculum.

While O'Connor complained about the fact that certain bishops would not tolerate co-education in their dioceses on any account he really stirred up a hornets' nest with his now famous statement about the role of the religious in education.

> *No one wants to push the religious out of education; that would be disastrous in my opinion. But I want them in as partners not always as masters* (O'Connor 1968:149).

The eight reactions to the O'Connor article that appeared with it in the particular edition of Studies were quite negative. The Teaching Brothers Association claimed that the Department was attempting to nationalise the schools by stealth. The charge was repeated two years later by the editor of Studies. Randles (1975) described the serious deterioration in relations between the Department of Education and the school managers. Whyte (1980) quoted the intemperate remarks of Minister O'Malley in the course of a debate in Seanad Éireann (the upper house of the national parliament) in February 1967.

> *No one is going to stop me introducing my scheme next September. I know I am up against opposition and serious organised opposition but*

they are not going to defeat me on this. ... Maybe some day I'll tell the tale and no better man than me to tell it. I shall pull no punches. Christian charity how are you. (Seanad Debates, LXII, 11090(9 Feb 1967; Whyte 1980:339).

The focus of the ensuing debate shifted from curriculum issues to that of control of schools. In November 1970, the concept of the Community School was introduced. The Department of Education was proposing to develop a unified post-primary school system based on the comprehensive model that had been developed since 1966. Officials convened meetings at different locations, where applications had been made for new buildings, to consider the possibility of replacing existing small second level schools with one large community comprehensive school (Rooney 1998).

The Department planned to amalgamate existing second level schools in locations where there were less than a total of 400 second- level pupils. They had calculated that 400 was the minimum number of pupils that was required for a viable comprehensive school. Thirty centres were identified throughout the country (Barber 1989). In some cases agreement was reached and community schools were built. In other cases there were bitter local controversies that drove secondary and vocational schools further apart than ever. Progress was slow. Over an eighteen-year period, 1970-1988, community schools had been established in nine of the thirty centres that had been targeted.

The local Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were particularly opposed to Community Schools, as they perceived the proposal as a handover of their schools to the church (Whyte 1980:391). They countered by changing the names of vocational schools to community colleges and extended their curricula

to be as comprehensive as possible (Barber 1989). On the other hand the secondary schools expanded their curricula to include Technical Graphics, Construction Studies and / or Engineering together with Accounting, Business Organisation and Economic History. Where local negotiations have resulted in amalgamations there appears to be a quid pro quo arrangement between the Department of Education and the Vocational Education Committees regarding the establishment of community schools or community colleges. The whole process has resulted in three main types of second level schools i.e. privately owned secondary schools, local authority vocational schools and state community / comprehensive schools. They are all independent of each other and only collaborate with one another in exceptional cases. The 1981 Schools Survey shows a clear categorisation of pupils on socio-economic grounds (Barber 1989).

The local authority vocational schools / community colleges continued to have a poor public image and were left to cater for a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students. This was due to a certain extent to a deliberate creaming policy on the part of the more academic secondary schools. Recently a member of the Redemptorist Order castigated the schools run by the religious orders for this policy.

> *Many congregations provided education at a nominal cost to the middle and lower middle classes, but increasingly the poor began to go to the small state sector, the vocational schools. In many Irish towns and cities a situation developed where a fairly shameless creaming off was done to ensure that the best and brightest students went to the religious run schools, leaving the intellectually weak, and even the remedial, and those*

from the disadvantaged part of the town, to go to the vocational school (Flannery 1997:22).

With the advent of 'free' second level education in 1967 there was a sustained increase in student numbers and a corresponding increase in competition for Third Level places. It is ironic that as vocational schools became more academic the secondary academic schools were becoming even more competitive as they became more and more embroiled in the race for points for Third Level entry. All the schools were becoming even more vocationalised as learning was becoming more and more technical in orientation albeit with a greater emphasis on logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences than on manual skills (Lynch 1989). The main motivation for students was increasingly entry to Third Level courses that would in turn provide access to a well-paid job. As the number of vocations to the religious life declined the economic factors were beginning to dominate the education scene.

Technical education was given a great boost with the establishment of regional technical colleges at different locations around the country in the early 1970s. With the help of the European Social Fund they have expanded and developed as alternative centres of Third Level education that have earned the respect of the general public. While technical education was being expanded in the Regional Technical Colleges, vocational training was disappearing from the vocational schools. By the early 1970s the Department of Education found itself under so much pressure to provide for an expanding school population and an expanding curriculum that it began handing over the vocational training part of its brief to the new Industrial Training Authority, ANCO (O'Connor 1998).

3.3.5. Intermediate Certificate Examination (ICE) Committee

The political conflicts regarding ownership and control of schools were paralleled by an ongoing debate regarding the curriculum. One of the great obstacles to the merging of the curricula of secondary and vocational schools into a comprehensive curriculum was the Intermediate Certificate examination. In 1970 the Minister for Education, Pádraig Faulkner, established a committee "to evaluate the present form and function of the Intermediate Certificate Examination and to advise on new types of examinations" (Andrews 1974:1). The ICE committee recommended the establishment of a central body to be called MEAS (Measurement Evaluation Assessment Service) that would take responsibility for all aspects of assessment at second level. It was envisaged that school based assessments at Junior Cycle level would be moderated by collaboration between schools working in small groupings. The proposed system of school-based assessment was an adaptation of that being implemented for CSE students by the Southern Examining Board in the UK at that time. The Intermediate Certificate Examination committee (ICE Committee) established a research project, under Professor John Heywood, to carry out a feasibility study on teacher based assessment. The final report stated that the work of the project demonstrated the feasibility of the Measurement Evaluation and Assessment Service proposed by the ICE committee subject to three qualifications:

- More attention needed to be given to the public examination of assessment;
- A more flexible approach to public examining is desirable;
- Moderation was more complex than the ICE committee had considered it to be (Heywood et al. 1980).

Barber (1989) suggested that there was a decrease in the Department's enthusiasm for curriculum reform from 1973 onwards. The ICE report generated many debates but the proposal to establish a central body with responsibility for curriculum and assessment was allowed to lie dormant for a number of years.

3.3.6. Curriculum Development Centres

In 1972 the Department of Education gave its approval for a number of curriculum development projects to be carried out at St. Patrick Comprehensive School, Shannon and at the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee. The Social and Environmental Studies project (SESP) began in 1972 and ended formally in 1977 (O'Connor 1986b). Seven hundred and fifty Intermediate Certificate students from eleven schools were assessed in Social and Environmental Studies by continuous assessment procedures proposed in the ICE report. The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) Curriculum Development Unit was also developing teacher based assessment procedures in relation to a project in Humanities and a project in integrated science (ISCIP). In autumn 1977 both centres ran into serious difficulties regarding teacher based assessment as a result of pressure from teacher unions (Trant 1998).

The Social and Environmental Studies project (SESP) was a valuable learning experience for me about curriculum development in general and about cross-curricular tasks in particular. The course was based on three major themes:

- Man and his Spaceship, Earth;
- The interdependence of people for food and for manufactured goods;

- People's aspirations.

The course was designed to help young people in the 12-15 age group to develop their capacity for concept formation (Ó Donnabháin 1978). Teachers were advised to plan units of work as a developing sequence of learning experiences based on a central idea. Three categories of learning experiences were suggested:

- learning experiences aimed at enabling students to gain specific information;
- learning experiences aimed at enabling students develop skills of interpretation, analysis and synthesis and
- learning experiences aimed at enabling students develop skills of judgement with a view to formulating informed attitudes to the world in which they were living.

The programme was developed in the context of a team teaching approach. Three requirements were identified for the effective functioning of teaching teams:

- *The organisation of a team so as to ensure that all members follow an agreed line of approach within a definite time-schedule;*
- *The identification and organisation of all the resources available to the team;*
- *The organisation of assessment procedures to evaluate the quality of the learning experienced by the students* (Ó Donnabháin 1978:11).

A planning grid was developed as a framework with which teaching teams could plan units of work but it was stressed that the aim was to enable the students to take an increasing amount of responsibility for decision making over the three year period. Eight specific skills were identified as being necessary to meet the

challenge of the final phase of the three-year course:

- To select a feasible topic that is related to a central theme;
- To write a proposal describing proposed project;
- To locate the relevant resources that are available;
- To collect information efficiently;
- To interpret and analyse findings;
- To present findings accurately and in an effective manner;
- To relate one's project to the work of one's fellow students;
- To formulate and express a personal reaction to a particular learning experience.

Some very impressive learning appears to have been experienced in schools in which there was a supportive principal and an effective team co-ordinator (Smith 1977). I learned many things about curriculum design, team-teaching and teacher based assessment from SESP but the most surprising lesson was the gulf that existed between the world of work and schools. I found that particularly worrying in the middle seventies with a significant number of the fifteen year olds who were studying SESP going on to a labour market in which there was an unprecedented level of unemployment.

3.4. Funding from Europe (1977- 1999)

3.4.1. Impact of European Social Fund

With entry to the European Economic Community in 1972, a new force appeared on the educational scene in Ireland in the form of funding from the European Social Fund. In the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Education had given over as much of vocational education as it could to the Department of Labour in the early seventies as it concentrated all its resources on trying to provide free second level education for an increasing youth population. The availability of European Social Fund money for vocational education and training but not for mainstream education reversed the trend (O'Connor 1998).

Middle Level Technician courses that could have been implemented in vocational and community/comprehensive schools were diverted to Regional Technical Colleges on the basis of the manner in which the European Social Fund regulations were interpreted in Ireland. Torlach O'Connor suggests that the decision, which had the effect of boosting the position of academic learning at the expense of technological learning in second-level schools in Ireland, was influenced more by internal politicking than by European regulations(O'Connor 1998).

European funding influenced second level schools in Ireland in three ways:

- enabling vocational and community / comprehensive schools to provide a range of initial vocational training programmes;
- enabling the implementation of a series of curriculum development projects on the theme of transition from school to adult and working life:
- Widening people's horizons through contacts with other systems that were

quite different from standard practices in Ireland at the time.

The nation-wide implementation of initial vocational training programmes parallel with curriculum development projects provided the platform from which the Leaving Certificate Applied evolved. The direct progenitors of Leaving Certificate Applied were the Senior Certificate programme and the Vocational Preparation and Training programme (VPT). The Senior Certificate programme was developed between 1983 and 1987 in the context of the SPIRAL project based at Shannon Curriculum Development Centre. Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) programmes were introduced to vocational and community/comprehensive schools in 1984.

The introduction of 'free' second level education coupled with an extremely young population (50% of the population was under twenty-five in the early 1980s) put schools under great pressure. Coincidental with the explosive increase in student numbers there were varied social changes such as increased unemployment and crime. Teenagers had a crime rate four times greater than the national average (Ireland 1985).

3.4.2. Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) programme

Pre-employment courses were introduced in a top down manner in 1977 by a circular from the Department of Education to all vocational and community/comprehensive schools. Despite the fact that there was minimal back-up support there was a high level of take up particularly by vocational schools. Eighteen hundred students from 80 vocational schools participated in the first year, 1977-78 (Leonard 1990). The pre-employment course was comprised of three elements, Vocational Studies, Work Experience and General

Studies. Pre-employment courses were replaced in 1984 by a programme that was very similar in structure called Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT). Secondary schools were also permitted to provide VPT and one hundred and eighteen of them took up the option in the first year. Leonard (1990) noted three important changes in the social and educational contexts of the programme. There was an acceptance that a more structured approach to vocational preparation was needed; that the personal development of young people was an integral part of the process of transition; and that there was a need for young people to have greater adaptability in the context of many traditional jobs substantially changing or in some cases disappearing altogether.

The Vocational Preparation and Training programme aimed to bridge the gap between the values and experiences of school and those of the workplace. The Department of Education circulars put great emphasis on the realities of the workplace that were to be reflected in the programme. Two groups were considered to be particularly vulnerable i.e. those leaving school at an early age without qualifications and girls, who were locked into a narrow range of occupations as a result of sex-stereotyping. Schools were encouraged to be flexible in the manner in which they implemented the broad guidelines in the Department of Education circulars so that young people could use VPT as a bridge to the labour market or as an alternative senior cycle programme. It was conceived as a one year self-contained programme that could lead on to a second one-year programme that put a greater emphasis on vocational skills and work experience. A great difficulty for VPT was the absence of a credible system of national certification.

After five years in operation Leonard considered the programme to be 'remarkably successful' in quantitative terms, confirming the need for an alternative senior cycle programme in schools in Ireland. On the other hand in qualitative terms he noted the deficit between what had been planned centrally and what was actually happening on the ground. He referred particularly to the reluctance of schools to react to local conditions and to the strain that the new programme was putting on schools as organisations. He concluded that the quality of the VPT programme depended on the leadership provided by individual school managements (Leonard 1990).

3.4.3. Pilot Projects on Transition from School to Adult and Working Life.

In 1978 three innovative projects were introduced as part of the European Community series of thirty linked pilot projects on the theme transition from school to adult and working life:

- SPIRAL Shannon project of interventions for relevant adolescent learning;
- Dublin Early School Leavers project;
- North Mayo/Sligo project on Education for Development.

The Department of Education overview of the three pilot projects described the projects as a "significant step forward in curriculum development" [in Ireland.] For the first time development of this kind was undertaken in collaboration with similar work in other countries and with the support, both financial and conceptual, of an international body. In addition, the scale of the projects was very much greater than that of any such work that had been undertaken to date (Ireland 1984:xxi).

It is proposed to focus on SPIRAL here as the Leaving Certificate Applied evolved to a considerable extent from its activities. Incidentally I was the director of SPIRAL. Based on my own first hand experience of reactions to SPIRAL, I can confirm the negative attitude of many teachers in the Shannon region to questioning the relevance of school to the needs of their students. In 1978, many teachers questioned the right of young people who had not attained Pass grades at the Intermediate Certificate Examination even to participate in Senior Cycle courses. There were indications that pre-employment classes were viewed by some teachers as a tactic for 'parking' potentially disruptive students so that the rest of the school could get on with its normal work (Ireland 1984). Other teachers showed great imagination and creativity in devising meaningful activities for reluctant learners with very little support. The attitude of many principals, whom I interviewed, was that youth unemployment was caused by economic factors that were far removed from school and over which they, as principals, had no control. Those initial interviews confirmed for me that schools were isolated from their local communities. Colleagues on the SPIRAL team reported similar impressions on their visits to schools. We decided that it was necessary to take specific initiatives that would provide 'bridges' to facilitate greater interaction between schools and the local communities they purported to serve. Three 'bridges' emerged -Local Liaison Networks, Mincompanies and an alternative whole curriculum, called Community Based Learning (CBL).

Minicompanies were an adaptation of the extracurricular programme, Junior Achievers (USA)/Young Enterprise (UK), so as to incorporate enterprise-based learning, informed by consultants from the world of business, in the

mainstream curriculum. The idea was shared with a fellow EC pilot project based at Strathclyde, Scotland and was quickly taken up by many schools in the UK (Jamieson et al. 1988). While the number of minicompanies in Ireland increased from two in 1978 to forty-four in 1982, the External Evaluation referred to reluctance on the part of many teachers to accept volunteers from local businesses as visiting consultants (Ireland 1984).

Community Based Learning was an alternative curriculum for sixteen-year-olds who had performed poorly at Junior Cycle level. Students spent approximately half of each week (15-20 hours) learning with the help of volunteer adults in a variety of places outside the school. Each student followed an individualised learning programme tailored to meet his/her particular needs, abilities, interests and goals. The Department of Education overview of the EC Pilot Projects noted the positive impact of the involvement of the local community on CBL participants.

> *Most school principals state that because of the personalised attention given to CBL pupils they gain in confidence, in communication (both oral and written) skills and relate much better to teachers, parents and peers. Many of the CBL participants are academically low achievers who fared rather badly in the Intermediate Certificate Examination. In general the individualised and group teaching of such pupils allows them to develop at their own rate... The interaction of the CBL pupils with the community at large has shown that they can perform normal work functions fairly adequately* (Ireland 1984:xiv).

Local Liaison networks were a systematic attempt to mobilise all possible persons and agencies within a locality to enrich the learning

environment of the young people who lived there. The liaison networks were initially seen as a necessary backup for programmes such as CBL and minicompanies but as they evolved they were perceived to have given SPIRAL a much wider brief. At a conference in Ennis in April 1982, Commissioner Ivor Richard said that SPIRAL contained a new imaginative approach to employment policy and local economic development. It had shown that the entire community must share responsibility for providing a structured period of transition from school to adult life. Richard claimed that SPIRAL had all the essentials of the Youth Guarantee that the Commission was formulating at that time (Ireland 1984).

3.4.4. Cross-curricular Tasks in Community Based Learning

The Community Based Learning (CBL) experience was particularly relevant in relation to cross-curricular tasks. It was an experience based learning course in which there were not any traditional subjects. The participants were young people who did not wish to follow the Leaving Certificate programme and who would have preferred to leave school if they could have got a job.

In Community Based Learning young people spent approximately half of each week (15 hours) learning with the help of volunteer adults in a variety of places outside the school. Each young person followed an individualised programme tailored to meet her / his particular needs, abilities, interests and goals (Ireland 1984).

The Community Based Learning programme put a particular emphasis on the development of the participants' skills. There were four categories of skills: Core skills; Essential Community skills; Basic skills and Career

Development skills.

There were five Core skills:

(i) The sensible way to approach an issue;

(ii) Looking at the world in original ways and becoming more confident to express yourself in creative ways;

(iii) Discovering my rights and responsibilities as a person;

(iv) Becoming a better person;

(v) A scientific approach to solving problems (Ireland 1984:86).

Essential community skills were described as those considered by the local community as being essential for an adult to function effectively in that community. Reading, Communications and Mathematics were listed as the Basic skills. Career Development skills involved young people in learning how to make and implement career decisions.

There were five basic learning strategies: Career Explorations; Learning Ventures; Competencies; Group Work and the Journal. CBL was an adaptation of a course called Experience Based Career Education (EBCE) that had been developed in Portland, Oregon, USA. We retained the American nomenclature for the basic strategies as a way of impressing on teachers that this was an entirely different approach to learning.

A Career Exploration was a three to five day encounter with the people and tasks related to a specific career in which the young person was interested. The primary purpose was to help the young person practise critical thinking in examining a particular experience. The aim was that a young person would have the opportunity to learn about a specific job and relate that learning to her/ his interests and abilities.

Learning Ventures were essentially cross-curricular tasks. There were two kinds of *Learning Venture*: pre-planned and negotiated. Pre-planned learning ventures were simply assignments given by the teacher. Negotiated learning ventures enabled the young person to follow up on a Career Exploration. The activities of the negotiated learning venture were built around the work of an adult in the community. The young person visited the adult for three hours per day over a three-week period as they completed the activities that they had negotiated with the teacher. The negotiation process went on almost continuously.

Competencies were described as those skills considered to be essential for adults to function effectively in their own community. Young people acquired competencies with the help of volunteer adults with proven expertise in particular areas. Examples of competencies were First Aid; Basic electricity; Baby Care.

Group Work was based on the Socratic method as outlined by Leslie Button (1974). The Journal was a way for students and staff to share thoughts and feelings with each other on an ongoing basis. The young person was required to share once per week her/his journal entries with a staff member on the understanding of complete confidentiality. The journal proved to be a very effective way of supporting a young person to reflect on personal experiences.

The staffing of CBL was on the basis of 1.25 teacher equivalents per twenty young people. The most effective staffing arrangement was one person full-time with the group and a second person for 5/6 hours per week who would act as a community liaison organiser. The teachers seem to have done very little didactic teaching but to have spent an inordinate amount of time negotiating

with individuals about what and how they were learning.

The CBL course was implemented effectively in six schools during the developmental phase (1979-82) and was subsequently disseminated to a further 16 schools (1982-1984). All the schools but one were girls' schools.

External Evaluation reported that there had been a marked increase in the young people's motivation and self-confidence together with a marked improvement in teacher/ student relationships (Ireland 1984). On the negative side teachers found it very difficult to maintain the momentum of community involvement as it was estimated that a pool of 50 volunteers was required to cater for 20 young people. Certification was in the form of a school certificate listing the activities that the young person had completed satisfactorily. All involved felt that there should be a form of national certification.

3.4.5. Senior Certificate programme

While Community Based Learning had proved to have been an effective strategy in getting young people who had become disaffected with school to continue studying albeit in a quite different manner, the lack of recognition in the form of national certification was seen to be a major drawback. As a result the Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey gave the second SPIRAL project (1983-1987) a clear brief, when she launched the project in July 1983:

> *The main thrust of the project will be in the development of alternative senior cycle programmes leading to national certification* (Gleeson 1990:64).

The alternative senior cycle programme was given the name Senior Certificate to distinguish it from the established Leaving Certificate progamme. Senior

Certificate was committed to:

- *promote in young people a wide range of personal qualities such as self-confidence, self-knowledge, the ability to take responsibilities and initiatives, the ability to make decisions and to work with others;*
- *enable students develop an informed sense of personal values;*
- *provide information and experience of a range of adult roles such as worker, supervisor, parent, citizen; volunteer; consultant; teacher; trade unionist; employer and social worker;*
- *promote the use of teaching/learning strategies appropriate to students who experience learning difficulties;*
- *promote gender equality;*
- *enable students to learn how to locate and use information;*
- *prepare students for the practical demands of living and for active citizenship;*
- *promote the use of the rich out-of-school environment and of volunteer adults in the community as resources for learning* (Shannon Curriculum Development Centre 1989:7)

Developmental work on Senior Certificate programmes, incorporating elements of Community Based Learning (CBL) and minicompany, began in September 1983. After consultations with a broad range of interested parties a number of modules were developed by practising teachers under the direction of the project team. A small-scale feasibility study was carried out in 12 schools between February and May 1984. In the light of positive feedback from the feasibility study the Department of Education agreed to provide a national system of assessment and certification in the form of Senior Certificate for participants

from 22 schools in the two-year period 1984-1986. The number of schools providing Senior Certificate had increased to 58 before the project ended in 1988. Intensive in-career development courses were provided for principals and teachers of the participating schools during the lifetime of the project (Gleeson 1990b).

The national system of assessment and certification was provided for seven discrete programmes:

- Work and Communications Skills;
- Food and Agriculture;
- Social and Cultural Studies;
- General Technology;
- Computer Applications;
- Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and
- Mathematics.

Schools were expected to make their own arrangements for Religious Education and Physical Education. Schools were authorised to implement Senior Certificate programmes in one of three ways:

- as a totally alternative senior cycle curriculum OR
- as part of Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) OR
- as individual Senior Certificate programmes within the context of Transition Year Option or Leaving Certificate.

In the event of the progammes being used as an alternative whole curriculum it was recommended that Work and Communications Skills should be the focal point. The Programme Outlines stressed the integrated nature of the curriculum.

> *It is important that these programmes, which differ significantly from traditional school subjects, be provided in an integrated manner for the students. It is for this reason that possible links with the other programmes are suggested in conjunction with the outlines of each particular programme* (Shannon Curriculum Development Centre 1989:6).

Senior Certificate examinations were organised by the Department of Education, which is itself the provider of national assessment and certification. Students were required to take tests at the end of each of the two years. Written, oral and aural tests were involved. In the case of some programmes students were required to present reports on their year's work and to discuss the reports with the examiners. Three grades were awarded: Pass with Distinction; Pass with Merit and Pass. Schools provided each student with a Record of Personal Experience and Achievement. The Department of Education provided the Senior Certificate examinations each year between 1985 and 1996. In 1987, 1240 students took the Senior Certificate examinations. The number of schools presenting students for Senior Certificate examinations had declined to 38 in 1995 when Leaving Certificate Applied was introduced.

The internal evaluation of the Senior Certificate programmes conducted by Shannon Curriculum Development Centre in 1986-87 was quite positive. Co-ordinators were pleased with the more positive attitudes of the young people, the evidence of their personal development, their increased interest in school and their enjoyment of out-of-school activities. Their main concerns were the future status of the programme, the availability of learning materials, the viability of second year groups (as approximately 30% of students were leaving at the end of

the first year of the programme) and the possibility of students transferring from Leaving Certificate to Senior Certificate. The main difficulties identified by teachers related to timetabling, student motivation, lack of resources and dissatisfaction with assessment procedures (Gleeson 1990b).

At a conference to mark the close of the second stage of the EC Pilot Projects in Ireland I gave my own views on the pilot projects in a paper entitled Alternative Curricula. Janet Smith subsequently prepared an edited version of the conference proceedings in the form of a Guide for School Principals on Cooperation and Partnership in Education (Smith 1987). I argued that the experience of the pilot projects in Ireland indicated that person centred learning was the only way that we could reach reluctant adolescents. I defined person centred learning as learning that starts from the learner's own perceived needs and interests and enables the learner to explore with increasing confidence and sophistication topics and issues that impinge on her/his own life. I emphasised the magnitude of the task of getting schools to change from subject-centred teaching to person-centred learning.

> *While the experience of the three Irish projects confirms the need for schools to change from subject-centred teaching to person-centred learning in their approach to young people who wish to go directly from school to the labour market, it also shows that such a change cannot be brought about abruptly and must be managed sensitively and sensibly with due recognition of the rate of change that particular sectors of the educational system can bear at any one time* (Ó Donnabháin 1986:3).

A change to person-centred learning in schools in Ireland had significant implications for the role of the teacher; for teacher education at both pre-service

and in-service and for school management with particular reference to the role of the principal.

Having listed the role changes for teachers that I envisaged I cautioned that progress needed to be slow.

> *A growing number of teachers have been quietly carrying out the above mentioned role changes in recent years but they are still a minority and they readily admit that such changes are not easy. There is clear evidence from the pilot projects that the majority of teachers will find the changes extremely difficult. A role-change of the scale required demands continuous support and enlightened leadership for teachers as they develop a whole range of new skills* (Ó Donnabháin 1986:4).

I expressed the view that teacher education at both pre-service and in-service had not been adequately addressing the needs of teachers with regard to the development of skills that would enable them to

- initiate negotiated learning with students;
- implement group-work techniques;
- function positively as members of teaching teams;
- develop self-appraisal skills that would enable them to reflect positively on their own performance.

I expressed regret that the EC pilot projects had failed to initiate a coherent dialogue with teacher education institutions regarding the role of teachers in person-centred learning.

The experience of the pilot projects had shown clearly that there would be little movement towards person-centred learning without the active support of the principals.

> *Principals must accept that a school that is aspiring to person-centred learning will be a more volatile institution than the traditional subject-centred school where everything happened more or less at the same time every day; and they must be prepared to adjust their leadership style accordingly. ... Many principals feel so burdened with responsibilities relating to plant, personnel, finance and public relations on a day-to-day basis that they are very unhappy at the amount of time they can give to the management of learning in their schools. This is very disturbing as the evidence of the past eight years clearly reaffirms that the management of learning must be given due recognition if the school is to make any radical change in the learning experienced by its students. ... There is a great need for principals in Irish schools to clarify for themselves their own particular role in the management of change in their schools. There are no easy answers to be imported from abroad. As professionals they must work it out for themselves as a matter of priority* (Ó Donnabháin 1986:5).

The reaction to Senior Certificate was generally quite positive. McNamara et al. (1990) said that the eighties had demonstrated that it was possible to provide curricula that could contribute more to the personal development of young people and to local economic development than the existing provision.

3.4.6. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Issues regarding curriculum and examinations came to the fore again in the mid-eighties. The Government established the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB) in 1984 to address issues relating to mainstream curriculum. In September 1984, the Interim Curriculum and Examinations Board published a curricular framework for Junior Cycle based on an Areas of Experience model that appears to have been influenced by Lawton's (1975) Common Culture Curriculum. There was an inherent inconsistency in the proposal as it was stated that the areas would be experienced through individual subjects. The Board was in favour of introducing vocational preparation as part of senior cycle provision for all young people.

After a change of government the CEB was disbanded in September 1987 and was replaced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). While the Curriculum and Examinations Board was to have been a statutory board, independent of the Department of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was an advisory body that reported to the Minister for Education. In 1989, a unified Junior Cycle course was eventually introduced to replace the Intermediate Certificate and the Group Certificate examinations. It was called the Junior Certificate. The rhetoric promised breadth and balance, relevance and quality. The reality has turned out to be a content dominated course assessed mainly by external terminal examinations. It encourages the use of didactic methodologies and a streamed form of school organisation. After much soul searching there has been very little substantial change in mainstream second level schooling at junior cycle level in Ireland.

3.4.7. Participation Rates

The numbers going on to senior cycle increased fourfold between 1961 and 1980 with the result that there was a far greater variety of students at senior cycle than ever before. This had obvious implications for the type of curricula to be provided (Kelleghan 1986).

By the early 1990s Ireland had a participation rate of 72.6% in full-time education for the 4-24 age group compared to a rate of 72% of the 5-24 age group in the EC as a whole (Drudy & Lynch 1993). In 1995, the Department of Education and Science set itself a target of increasing the completion rate of Senior Cycle to 90% of each age cohort by the year 2000 but the Deputy Chief Inspector stated in April 1998 that the number remaining to the end of the Senior Cycle had stabilised at or around 82% (Ó Dálaigh 1998). However there is no ground for complacency. Dr. Don Thornhill, Chairman of the Higher Education Authority, noted that the percentage of the population aged between 25 and 34 years who have completed secondary level education is 3 percentage points below the average for the EU, and 7 percentage points below the OECD average. The Irish figure in relation to the 25-64 year old group is 7 percentage points below the average for the EU and 13 percentage points behind the average for the OECD (Thornhill 1998). The other worrying factor is the persistent social inequalities in the rates of admission to higher education (Clancy 1988; 1992).

McCormack and Archer (1998a) put forward four reasons why disadvantaged students cannot compete in the Third Level 'points race'. The curriculum is largely irrelevant to the needs, interests and abilities of disadvantaged students. People who can afford it boost their results through

paying for special tuition. There is the possibility of social class bias in the methods of assessment. Middle class families are better equipped to deal with what is a rather complicated system. The Commission on the Points System established by the Minister for Education and Science reported that about 16% of the population belonged to the lower socio-economic groups. The Commission recommended that

> *the quota for disadvantaged students in third-level education should be increased to 5% of the intake into third-level education. This quota should apply to all courses. The longer term aspiration should be to increase the percentage of disadvantaged young people in third level education so that it would reflect more accurately their proportion in the population as a whole* (Hyland 1999:139).

The recommendation and aspiration ring a little hollow when one searches in vain for any reference to Leaving Certificate Applied in Section 12.13 of the Report headed *Recognition of Qualifications other than the Leaving Certificate for Points Purposes* (Hyland 1999:158).

3.4.8. National Education Convention 1993

The Report of the Commission on the Points System is the latest in a number of influential reports regarding Senior Cycle provision during the nineties. In 1990, the Curriculum Awareness Action Group reported on the low levels of achievement at senior cycle (CAAG 1990). An OECD Review of National Policies for Education in the case of Ireland was published in 1991. The OECD examiners were critical of the situation in schools.

> *The face that the Irish school presents to the world is quite recognisably that of previous generations. There is a growing dissonance between it and the development of learning sciences and modern teaching technologies that requires a different approach... ... There is undoubtedly a mismatch between the stated goals of education and the declared need for structural change in society on the one hand, and substantial areas of school practice on the other* (OECD 1991:55).

The Review noted that while Ireland in common with most OECD countries was strengthening the more socially instrumental and utilitarian elements of its curricula at all levels, the curriculum problem was most acute at secondary level.

> *The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority* (OECD 1991:69).

The OECD examiners stated that the authorities had the choice of developing either a much more powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured general secondary education curriculum (OECD 1991).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment had raised issues relating to senior cycle provision in a consultative document in 1990 followed by a position paper presented to the Minister for Education in 1991. In 1992 the Industrial Policy Review Group published a report that advocated a movement towards the German Dual System. In the same year the Government of Ireland published a Green Paper entitled *Education for a Changing World* that rejected the suggested move to a Dual System but advocated a unitary system with a marked emphasis on enterprise and technological education. In launching the

Green Paper, the Minister for Education invited submissions from all that were concerned about the quality of education. A vigorous debate followed in a variety of forums around the country. The Department of Education received almost a thousand written submissions. A report in 1993 of the National Economic and Social Council argued that concern for linkages between education and social and economic development did not necessarily undermine a balanced approach (NESC 1993).

In October 1993 the Minister for Education organised a National Convention of all the interest groups in education. The report of the convention secretariat boasted that the convention was an unprecedented democratic event in the history of Irish education. John Coolahan, the Secretary-General of the Convention said:

> *There is no precedent in the history of Irish education, and, as our international colleagues tell us, there is no precedent in other countries either for the process in which we are engaged. The Convention is a pathfinder in democratic participation and consultation* (Coolahan 1994:229).

The convention was unquestionably unprecedented in Ireland in that between 11 and 21 October 1993 it brought together representatives of educational bodies, the social partners to discuss what the chairman described as key issues of educational policy (Coolahan 1994).

The convention had the potential of laying the foundation for the development of a social constructionist perspective on curriculum as advocated by Goodson (1990) and Alexander (1993) and more recently by Elliott (1998). Goodson was concerned about prescribed curricula supported by mystiques

regarding state schooling that imply that all the expertise rests with the state bureaucracies and the universities. He warned of the dangers of disenfranchising teachers in *the discourse of schooling*. On the other hand he warned about going to the other extreme of over-dependence on the common sense of practitioners as represented by the Stenhouse inspired CARE approach. Goodson accused both approaches of concentrating on what ought to be happening in schools to the detriment of what is actually happening. He argued for a more balanced approach (Goodson 1990:305).

Alexander warned that while there were no clearly defined rules regarding the competition for curricular space there was a tendency for political issues to dominate the discourse to the neglect of the curriculum development process (Alexander 1993). Alexander argued that the growing diversity of views and interests in an increasingly pluralistic world needs to be reflected in curriculum development. He believed that the role of social groups in curriculum development must be transformed. He suggested that three steps need to be taken. The status of curriculum work needed to be raised among practitioners and the community at large. More prominence needed to be given to what he termed systemic curriculum developers who in turn should monitor social groups' concerns about curriculum matters (Alexander 1993).

Elliott (1998) suggested that there were lessons to be learnt from two waves of curriculum reform in UK; one, teacher driven change in the late 1960s/early 1970s, and the other state driven change in the 1980s. Both failed in Elliott's opinion. He had a vision of curriculum reform as a social experiment, in which national curricula would be continually constructed and reconstructed in the light of on-going debate at local, regional and national fora (Elliott 1998).

The opportunity was not taken by the national convention in Ireland. Even though the expressed purpose of the convention was to engage in discussion on key issues of educational policy in Ireland, curriculum issues were not discussed in any detail.

> *Curriculum, though a crucial element of the educational system, was not a major discussion issue at the Convention. This should not be taken as an indication of a lack of appreciation of its centrality* (Coolahan 1994:69)

. It is difficult to take the lack of debate as anything other than an indication of a lack of appreciation of the centrality of curriculum when one considers that curriculum issues have consistently tended to be peripheral to educational discourse in Ireland. It confirms Alexander's point that people tend to operate chiefly at the political level and to neglect the curriculum development process at the professional level (Alexander 1993).

In a recent paper delivered at a conference, organised by the Educational Studies Association of Ireland in Dublin (April 1999), Gleeson presented a penetrating analysis of recent debates in Ireland relating to curriculum. He argued cogently that the debates had focused on narrow technical issues and had refused to address the fundamentals (Gleeson 2000).

3.4.9. Development of Leaving Certificate Applied

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment formed a Steering Committee under the chairmanship of a successful businessman, Senator Fergal Quinn, to oversee the incorporation of Senior Certificate and VPT (Vocational Preparation and Training programme) in a new Leaving Certificate programme to be known as Leaving Certificate Applied. A team was commissioned to

design the new programme under the leadership of Jim Gleeson who had been the project leader in the SPIRAL2 project (1983-1987) that had developed the Senior Certificate programme.

The chairman of the National Convention 1994 reported that a consensus had emerged with regard to Senior Cycle. The need for an alternative to the existing (1994) provision at Leaving Certificate was universally accepted but there did not appear to have been a great awareness of the scale of the implications for a subject dominated school system. The Convention report explained that discussion on the proposed Leaving Certificate Applied was inhibited by a lack of precise information, at the time of the Convention, regarding the detailed structure of the programme. However the number of problems that were anticipated indicate a lack of awareness of the magnitude of the curricular changes that would be required. The Convention disappointingly contributed little to the development of a social constructivist perspective on the evolving work-related curriculum.

In spring 1995, the Government published a White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*, in which it was announced that the Leaving Certificate Applied would be introduced on a phased basis in September 1995 (Ireland 1995). Jim Gleeson and Gary Granville, who had been designing the Leaving Certificate Applied for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment since 1993, presented a paper at a conference organised by the Educational Studies Association of Ireland at University College, Cork on 31 March 1995. The paper attempted to explore the symbiotic relationship between curriculum development, educational planning and national economic and social policy as manifested in the introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied. They argued that

curriculum reform must not only be facilitated by educational planning but that it should also influence national social and economic policy within which such educational planning occurred. They described the Minister's decision to provide a radically different alternative programme within the framework of the Leaving Certificate as a major and decisive step in the relatively short history of curriculum development in Ireland (Gleeson & Granville 1996). They claimed that the introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied was a significant statement regarding the role of education in addressing social problems such as unemployment, inequality and poverty. They linked the Minister's decision to the concern expressed by the social partners regarding the danger of Leaving Certificate Applied being perceived as being inferior to the traditional Leaving Certificate. They welcomed the statement by the National Economic and Social Council that the prospects for success of alternative programmes at Senior Cycle would be enhanced by the provision of structured routes for participants in such programmes to further education and training and to the labour force (NESC 1993).

Gleeson and Granville (1996) claimed that it would be indefensible to offer young people learning experiences no matter how desirable from an educational point of view unless the certification of such learning had currency on the labour market. Negotiated governance has been a feature of public life in Ireland in recent years in which the government of the day regularly draws up a national agreement with all the social partners for a specific number of years governing pay scales and related economic and social issues. Gleeson and Granville (1996) argued that in the context of negotiated governance the government and social partners should take the decision to provide a structured

access for participants in Leaving Certificate Applied to further education, training and employment

3.5. Summary

Leaving Certificate Applied has evolved in a centralist system of schooling controlled in turn by the Church and the State in which there has been very little debate on the process of learning. Access to second-level education has increased dramatically over the past forty years but there are still major inequities in the system. A number of factors have influenced the situation: the religious factor; the growing power of teacher trade unions; the universities; the parents; the political will of the government of the day; the impact of EU funding. The centralist system had evolved in the 19th century under British rule in the form of a coalition between Church authorities and State administrators. The Church was happy to allow the administrators to administer the system as long as a Roman Catholic interpretation of the Classical-Humanist tradition prevailed in the schools. On the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the system was taken over in its entirety by the native government. The only substantial change was the commitment to use the schools as the means of restoring the Irish language as the spoken language of the people. Apart from debate about the reality of the approach to the language question there appears to have been very little dialogue on educational issues. Even Government ministers were loath to do anything other than administer the system. The lack of debate on educational matters is consistent with the form of intellectual inertia that was a feature of post-colonial Ireland. The Church can be held partly responsible for the intellectual inertia but another cause was the inferiority

complex of a colonised population resulting in a tendency to imitate inordinately the systems of their erstwhile rulers (Lee 1989). Over the past twenty years the position of the Roman Catholic Church in education has changed significantly. There has been a dramatic decline in vocations to the religious life. Religious orders have been withdrawing from schools. The number of elitist boarding schools has been reduced. Yet, almost half the designated bodies that advise the Department of Education and Science on formation of education policy represent the views of one or other of the churches (Drudy & Lynch 1993).

The behaviour of the religious orders was quite ambivalent. Some showed a great commitment to a more egalitarian system of education while others openly defended their status by ensuring that pupils who might lower the 'tone' of their school were not admitted.

Over the past forty years teacher unions have become very powerful in Ireland. They have succeeded in improving the working conditions of their members and have played a key role in national agreements between the State and the social partners. They have had a major influence on curriculum development, as the imprimatur of the unions is now an essential precondition for the introduction of any innovation. The unions' refusal to allow their members to participate in teacher based assessment has been a major constraint. The universities have a great influence on second-level schools as there is intense competition for entry to the most sought after faculties such as medicine, pharmacy and veterinary science since the introduction of a points system based on the results of the Leaving Certificate examinations. There is a serious social imbalance in relation to those who are admitted to higher education. The universities have not been very supportive of the State's policy of a

comprehensive system. There was a reluctance to recognise subjects such as Engineering and Art and Home Economics for the purpose of generating points for university entrance (Barber 1989). The lowly position of curriculum studies in preservice teacher education courses in Irish universities is an inhibiting factor in innovation in second-level schools.

Parents have a considerable influence on second-level schools. As citizens of a post-colonial country of meagre indigenous wealth Irish people value education particularly as a passport to upward social mobility (Drudy & Lynch 1993). The result has been an on-going process of vocationalisation of schooling informed by classical -humanist traditions since the foundation of the Irish State in 1922. Ireland is essentially a deeply divided society that pays lip service to egalitarian ideals. The school one's children attend is a powerful status symbol, and indeed the course being followed is another. As a result of a falling birthrate competition between schools is becoming keener and schools are becoming more responsive to the wishes of parents. And points for university entrance are the most tangible criteria by which schools are judged. Both parents' organisations and school authorities decry the inordinate pressure that is being put on young people and each group blames the other. School principals cite parental pressure as one of the greatest obstacles to innovation.

There is not a clear ideological division between political parties in Ireland with regard to educational issues. As a result governments of different parties have not been prepared to persist with policies that may be unpopular with a volatile electorate. The result has been a less than vigorous pursuit of policies, informed by principles of social justice that are at odds with particular vested interests. The pragmatism of people together with a certain intellectual

inertia has combined to focus educational debates in Ireland on sectoral issues of manageable proportions. To paraphrase Schon (1987), there is a tendency to remain on the safe high ground dealing with unimportant problems rather than descending into the swamp of the really important issues.

European funding has had a positive impact on initial vocational education and training in Ireland. Technological education expanded rapidly with the growth of regional colleges of technology. At second level the vocational elements of schooling were given an increased impetus and there was significant and sustained support for curriculum development focusing on the transition from school to adult and working life. Horizons were widened through contacts with colleagues from other member states, who were working with young people in a variety of different cultures, and examples of good practice were shared.

CHAPTER FOUR

POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CROSS-CURRICULAR TASKS AND EMPOWERMENT

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to clarify my perceptions of the theoretical relationships between cross-curricularity and the empowerment of young people. In Section 4.2. I outline the world-wide move to vocationalisation and possible future developments in second-level curricula with particular reference to curricular reforms in Ireland. I examine different aspects of cross-curricularity with particular reference to the skills involved and factors that need to be taken into account when implementing cross-curricular tasks. In Sections 4.3. and 4.4. I consider two areas that are integral to the personal effectiveness of adolescents, self-esteem and employability. In Section 4.3. I examine the different factors that affect the self-esteem of school-going adolescents. In Section 4.4. I examine the volatile nature of employability at the present time and consider ways in which young people could prepare to meet its challenge. In Section 4.5. I consider the importance of critical thinking in the empowerment of young people. I examine different approaches to learning with particular reference to curriculum integration. In Section 4.6. I consider the contribution that a sense of community could make to the empowerment of an individual, a school or a network of different social systems. I examine ways in which schools could build links with other social systems

in the local community and explore the concept of a school as a learning community, and the key role that it could play in the development of a learning society. Each of the Sections 4.3., 4.4., 4.5. and 4.6. ends with theoretical assumptions regarding the potential relationship between cross-curricular tasks and aspects of the process of empowerment.

4.2. Cross-curricularity

4.2.1. Curricular Reforms

The turbulence of economic life triggered by the information technology revolution and growing globalisation, exemplified by youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s, stimulated a variety of initiatives at the level of the European Community and at national level in countries both inside and outside the EC. There were complaints that schools were in some way responsible for lack of economic competitiveness by failing to produce efficient workers.

In the U.K. the 'Great Debate' generated by Prime Minister Callaghan by his Ruskin College speech in October, 1976, was followed by a series of initiatives taken by the Thatcher government, that came to be known as the New Vocationalism (Jonathan 1990). The establishment of the Manpower Services Commission in 1973 and the Further Education Unit (FEU) in 1978 had ensured that the structures were in place for the new Thatcher government to carry out a major restructuring of education and training in the United Kingdom (Finegold and Soskice 1990). Berryman & Bailey (1992) referred to the disquiet expressed in the USA in publications such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *The Forgotten Half: pathways to Success for America's youth and young families* (1988) and *America's Choice: High skills or low wages* (1990). Blackmore (1990), quoting from the Report of the Australian Education Council Task Force on Education and Technology (1985) claimed that there had been a perceptible

move from progressivism to vocationalisation in Australia. In fact there appears to have been a world-wide move towards some form or other of vocationalisation (Lauglo and Lillis 1988).

Skilbeck et al (1994) made a distinction between the process and the function of vocationalism. The process is about education for living a life in which work is a universal characteristic while the function is about the educational system serving the needs of the economy. He explained that much of the suspicion regarding vocationalisation stemmed from the fear that a correct balance would not be maintained between the process and the function. He claimed that the extent to which the vocationalisation of education progressed was being regarded as an indication of the manner in which countries were performing economically (Skilbeck et al. 1994).

Skilbeck et al. (1994) argued for a major reform of secondary education rather than attempts to integrate vocational courses with mainstream schooling that did not in itself change substantively.

> *This move has, however had the unintended consequence of disadvantaging students in the new practical and vocational stream at schools because of a tendency to assimilate that stream to the general, academic model of the traditional secondary school rather than rethink the whole basis of secondary education* (Skilbeck et al. 1994:).

A major obstacle to the reform of secondary education is the division between the liberal and vocational, between academic and practical education. The division can be traced down through the ages from ancient Greece to the end of the second millennium (Trant 1999). Young's (1971) claim that the division represents a stratification of knowledge that reflects the inequalities in society is now generally accepted (Young 1998). Trant (1999) re-echoed Dewey's belief that liberal education at its best had a

vocational dimension, while vocational education at its best had a liberal dimension. He argued for a new synthesis, for a rediscovery of elements of the one in the traditions of the other, while recognising the real difference that exists between them.

> *Our guiding principle should be our understanding of the inner meaning and dynamic of the human personality, how a human being needs to be unified and liberated through whatever subject or course of study he or she undertakes* (Trant 1999:18).

Wirth (1994) argued that the need for serious efforts at academic/vocational integration were now so great that positive action had to be taken. While Lawton (1997) agreed with Wirth about the necessity to integrate academic and vocational elements, he did not underestimate the difficulty.

> *Curricula should be designed with a view to eliminating the distinction between academic and vocational: young people need aspects of both traditions ... ... We need a curriculum which gets beyond thinking in academic and vocational terms. This will not be easy because the two concepts are deeply embedded, and segregated, in our culture* (Lawton 1997:105).

In fact the problem is much more complicated than the conflict between the ideologies of what are in effect two different elitist groups of achievers, the academics and the technocrats (Bernstein 1990:63). The underachievers, who fail to meet the standards of either elite or who do not aspire to the same goals as the achievers, make up a significant percentage of society. Traditionally, they have tended to be given a lower priority within school systems.

> *Our schools took seriously the learning of the baccalaureate-bound, but the rest were being less prepared than carried along* (Berryman & Bailey 1992:4).

Initial vocational education courses or prevocational courses, as they are called by some commentators, are an attempt to address this neglect. While they appeared, in many cases, to be effective contact points with young people, who had become disaffected with school, there were two major weaknesses. They excluded young people from access to bodies of knowledge organised in academic subjects and they did not provide a means of progression within the formal schooling system. Young (1998) argued for a new type of 14 -19 curriculum that provided access for all to knowledge as organised in traditional academic subjects plus experience and understanding of evolving workplaces. His proposal was based on the assertion that personal experience and economic change have become deeply intertwined in recent years.

> *This intertwining of goals of personal development and employability is reflected in the critical tension between the intellectual demands of academic subjects and the practical demands of changes in the nature of work; both need to be at the centre of the 14-19 curriculum and be the basis of interrogating one another* (Young 1998:58).

Young (1998) stressed that he was not arguing against traditional subjects per se but rather for greater connectivity between different specialist subjects in the context of interrogating the changing economic environment in which people are living.

Lawton (1998) proposed five major changes for a curriculum for the 21st century:

- *From Content and Objectives to Skills and Processes;*
- *From Subjects and Cognitive Attainment to Holistic Learning;*
- *From Didactic Teaching to Self-directed Learning;*
- *From Academic or Vocational to Integration of Both Aspects of Experience;*
- *From a National Curriculum to Lifelong Learning* (pp.8-12).

Young (1998) has acknowledged the major obstacle that existing divisive qualifications systems present to reconciling liberal and vocational education. He warned that any attempt at curricular reform in England and Wales that did not take the impact of the qualifications systems into account was certain to fail. The position is similar in Ireland in that the results of the Leaving Certificate written examination in academic subjects are the sole criteria on which entry to university courses are based. Any attempt at reform in Ireland must take cognisance of the manner in which second level schooling in Ireland is dominated by the requirements of the Leaving Certificate examination and the points system for Third Level entry related to it.

The position in Ireland differed significantly from England and Wales in that traditionally approximately 70% of the school going population followed academic courses. The percentage did not appear to change significantly over the past forty years as the percentage of the 18-year-old cohort at school rose from less than 20% to more than 80%. The only pathway to national certification was via the academic subjects of the Leaving Certificate. In the mid-eighties an alternative work-related programme leading to national certification in the form of the Senior Certificate was made available to a limited number of schools. Despite positive reports by external evaluation, the Senior Certificate was regarded by the general public as being inferior to the Leaving Certificate as it was not recognised as an entry qualification to any Third Level courses. At that time policy makers were in a position to take a courageous step that would have laid the foundation for a truly comprehensive curriculum capable of serving all young people. If only a small minority of participants in an initial vocational education programme such as Senior Certificate had been given access to Third Level entry, it could have created the momentum that would enable learning based on experience and understanding of the workplace to meet learning based on academic subjects on an

equal footing so that a creative tension would have been created between the practical demands of the former and the intellectual demands of the latter. Instead they opted for three forms of Leaving Certificate, two of which led to entry to all Third Level courses and one, Leaving Certificate Applied, that was completely ring-fenced with progression to a narrow range of further education courses. The policy makers appeared to have feared that neither school managements nor teachers had the expertise necessary to face the challenge.

The Irish strategy of three forms of Leaving Certificate (see Chapter One) has two possibilities. It could be dismissed as a short-sighted initiative that would disadvantage those who follow vocational courses without making any significant changes in mainstream academic courses as Skilbeck et al. (1994) warned. The dismissal of curriculum as an item on the agenda of the National Convention on Education (1993) provides solid basis for such a viewpoint. The viewpoint is further strengthened by the establishment at the same time of the National Council for Vocational Awards as a statutory body quite independent of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. On the other hand it could be argued that the three forms of Leaving Certificate provide a framework for the gradual development of a curriculum in tune with economic developments in the 21st century. Leaving Certificate Vocational, comprised of academic subjects with three additional modules, enterprise education, preparation for work and work experience, provides a possibility of developing the connective specialisations recommended by Young (1998) by which young people could use academic subjects to interrogate the economic environment in which they are living. There are three main obstacles to such a development:

- The existing academic/vocational divisions;

- The assessment/certification structures that reinforce the divisions; (Academic subjects are assessed by Department of Education while the additional modules are assessed by the National Council for Vocational Awards.)
- The capacity of schools to change from the divisive specialization of the present to the connective specialization envisioned in cross-curricularity.

The impact that three 40-minute modules per week in Leaving Certificate Vocational can have on long established approaches to free-standing academic subjects with clearly defined boundaries is questionable. Granville (1999) reported that "despite the extremely high positive rating given to in-career development programmes, the levels of transfer of teaching approaches to other programmes and courses remains relatively low". While the ringfencing of Leaving Certificate Applied had the negative characteristics of excluding participants from access to academic subjects and from progression to third level, it created far greater freedom for teachers to develop innovative teaching methodologies and assessment procedures than Leaving Certificate Vocational. Unfortunately, lack of agreement between the Department of Education and the teacher unions has inhibited any significant developments in relation to assessment. The most innovative feature of Leaving Certificate Applied is the cross-curricular *Student Task* that is assessed externally at half-yearly intervals as part of a national system of certification. The effectiveness with which Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curricular tasks have been implemented provides insights into the capacity of schools in Ireland to move towards a more integrated curriculum capable of contributing to the empowerment of young people of all levels of ability.

4.2.2. Aspects of Cross-curricularity

Wragg (1997) identified cross-curricularity as one of the three main dimensions of any curriculum. The other two were subjects and teaching/learning styles. Cross-curricularity is an embracing concept that has the capacity to address all the core elements of personal development, physical, aesthetic, social, spiritual, intellectual, moral, that empower a learner to take greater responsibility for her/his own life. Cross-curricularity also addresses the learner's ability to interact positively with her/his whole community with regard to skills, culture, home, occupation, leisure and citizenship (Nisbet 1957). Cross-curricularity is capable of traversing all aspects of the curriculum both overt and hidden if the school authorities and teachers have the will and the expertise to create the required learning environment. It encapsulates the holistic educational experience that a person has through going to a particular school. Wragg (1997) cited two major difficulties that schools have with cross-curricularity. Some teachers have difficulty in taking responsibility for matters that are outside the clearly defined boundaries of their own subject. Many teachers have difficulty in developing an overview of an overarching concept, such as employability or critical thinking, across the range of disparate activities that go on in a school. In many courses it is presumed that cross-curicularity is occurring automatically without any particular initiative on the part of the school. Where schools decide to address cross-curricularity deliberately a common strategy is a cross-curricular task.

The origins of cross-curricular learning may be traced back to Dewey's (1916) concern for the social significance of curriculum. While there was a major debate in USA in the second and third decades of the 20th century the question of learner-led cross-curricular learning did not attract much attention from educational theorists until

the late 1960s when there was a number of high profile integrated studies projects involving, for example, Bruner in USA and Stenhouse in UK. There was a revived interest in cross-curricular, learner controlled learning in the 1980s as a result of considerable developments in science/technology based interdisciplinary studies aimed at meeting the growing demand for symbolic analysts. Waks (1997) described symbolic analysts as "workers who identify and solve non-routine problems and broker solutions to them" (p393). Reich (1993), who is credited with being the first to use the term 'symbolic analyst', said that education should endeavour to develop four basic capabilities in more people – abstraction, system thinking, experimentation and collaboration. While Lawton (1998) welcomed Reich's views he warned that they do not get to the heart of the problem for the school and its curriculum. In fact he warned that Reich's views were dangerously close to the "false gods of technology and consumerism" (Lawton 1998:18). Also in the last decades of the 20th century, concern regarding youth unemployment in EC member states resulted in a great variety of initial vocational education initiatives, involving cross-curricular learning, aimed at assisting young people to make the transition from school to adult life. Young (1998) referred to the role of connective specialization in a curriculum for the future emphasising "the importance of developing new types of cross-subject skills and understanding as well as the ability to innovate and to apply and use learning in different contexts" (p.70).

Roberts (1994) identifies five stages in student-directed cross-curricular tasks – the planning stage; the operationalisation stage; the processing stage, the presenting stage and the debriefing stage. A wide array of skills is required of students in order to participate effectively in cross-curricular tasks. The skills may be classified in two groups: general core skills and stage specific skills. Roberts (1994) identified the general core skills as time management; social skills; reflective skills; self-appraisal

skills and the ability to seek help when required. Stage specific skills varied from stage to stage. At the planning stage students are required to learn how to clarify aims, how to draw up long-term plans, set deadlines, revise deadlines in the light of developments, and meet essential deadlines. At the operationalising stage students are required to practise a variety of communication and social skills in the case of an investigation or the provision of a service, or a variety of design and draughting skills in the case of making an artefact. The stage also provides an opportunity for students to apply whatever Information Technology skills they possess to the sourcing of relevant information. At the processing stage an investigative task demands skills of interpretation, analysis and generalisation, whereas the making of an artefact will require the interpretation of drawings as well as the implementation of manual skills that have already been learnt in another context. At the presenting stage students are required to display report writing skills. The presenting stage also provides an opportunity for students to apply whatever basic Information Technology skills they have acquired in the production of a report. At the debriefing stage the focus is on reflective skills, interpretation, analysis, generalisation and self-appraisal skills. These skills are the principal means that the student uses either deliberately or inadvertently when integration occurs leading to conceptualisation or reconceptualisation.

4.2.3. Problems in relation to Cross-curricular Learning

During 1989 and 1990 the National Curriculum Council (NCC) in UK issued a series of documents in relation to the cross-curriculum area of the National Curriculum (Morrison 1994). The NCC provided non-statutory guidance to schools regarding the implementation of five cross-curricular themes – education for economic and industrial understanding; health education; careers education and guidance; environmental

education and education for citizenship. Whitty et al. (1994) reported on the implementation of cross-curricular themes in secondary schools in England and Wales. They also drew on a parallel study which took place in Northern Ireland where the 1989 Education Reform Order required schools to implement six cross-curricular themes – education for mutual understanding; cultural heritage; information technology, economic awareness, careers education and guidance and health education. In the majority of schools in both jurisdictions themes appeared to have been taught through a permeation approach.

The purpose of the research was to explore the tensions between the cross-curricular themes and a subject–based school culture supported by the requirements of the National Curriculum. The research, which was greatly influenced by Bernstein's theories about the classification and framing of educational knowledge (Bernstein 1975), sought to explore the extent to which the themes would become established as organising devices within the secondary curriculum.

A questionnaire was sent to 1 in 4 secondary schools in England and Wales (N=1431) and to all secondary schools in Northern Ireland (N=272). The response rate was 42% in England and Wales and 46% in Northern Ireland. 82% of schools in England and Wales and 89% of schools in Northern Ireland claimed to have changed their approach to cross-curricular work in recent years. The responses to the questionnaires indicated that the various themes had permeated across the core and other foundation subjects to varying degrees. The second phase of the research focused on eight schools in England and Wales and two schools in Northern Ireland. Headteachers, teachers and pupils were interviewed and cross-curricular work was observed in the classrooms. The interviews indicated some agreement between pupils and curriculum managers about the subjects in which the themes might be taught but

there were also significant discrepancies. The feedback from classroom observations indicated that the themes were often difficult to identify at classroom level (Whitty et al. 1994:179). They identified a number of overlapping key problems associated with cross-curricular teaching that are of particular relevance to Leaving Certificate Applied such as the attitude of teachers, the conflicting tensions between subject-based learning and cross-curricular learning and the need for credible assessment procedures.
In relation to the attitudes of teachers Whitty et al. (1994) reported that the relative invisibility of themes was due to the reluctance of some teachers to become involved. They had met subject teachers in virtually all the schools visited, who believed that they should not be asked to teach the themes. Male science teachers were particularly worried that cross-curricular themes would pollute their subject. However, Whitty et al. (1994) concluded that "the difficulties of teaching themes through a permeation model do not necessarily arise from a wilful resistance of individual teachers to teaching the themes, but more from their insistence on the dominance of subject principles in structuring pupil learning" (p.171).

Whitty et al. (1994) suggested that Bernstein's work on evoking contexts, recognition rules and realization rules was one way of unravelling the conflicting tensions between subject-based learning and cross-curricular learning. In Bernstein's terms the evocation of different discourses from different contexts underlined the need for both recognition and realisation rules that guide people as to what is and is not acceptable in particular situations. Cross-curricular discourses are volatile in so far as generally they do not have any set rules and procedures to be followed. On the other hand in the case of subjects, each has its own rules and procedures that are followed with varying degrees of precision. The subtle differences in the level of precision to which rules and procedures are followed caused tensions as cross-curricular discourses

moved across a wide range of subjects. The position was further exacerbated when cross-curricular discourse embraced common-sense topics from everyday life.

> *The problem facing themes is that the sort of talk that allows links to be made between subject discourses and everyday life challenges this strong boundary between school talk and non-school talk. We found that the status of talk and the extent of its permissibility was therefore ambiguous in the eyes of many pupils, as well as those of some teachers. Furthermore those very types of talk that attempted to forge connections between school talk and talk of 'everyday life', and which were important to the effective teaching of themes, were valued differentially by different subjects. What counted as legitimate talk varied from subject to subject, making the cross-curricular treatment of the same theme extremely problematic in that what counted as appropriate talk about a theme in one subject differed from that in another. For some pupils, the consequent ambiguity led on occasions to the transgression of the rules applicable to particular subjects* (Whitty et al. 1994 p.172).

Whitty et al. (1994) stressed the need for identifiable assessment criteria for work associated with cross-curricular learning. They warned that without clearly defined criteria for assessing cross-curricular work there was a danger that it would be assessed, if at all, in a manner that might be quite inappropriate. The absence of clearly defined assessment criteria would place unrealistic expectations on the shoulders of the students involved (Whitty et al. 1994).

The UK experience as reported by Whitty et al. (1994) indicated that the effective implementation of cross-curricular learning demanded that cognisance is taken of the following factors:

- The magnitude of the change involved for teachers who have grown up in schools with clearly bounded subjects and who have subsequently developed a certain level of expertise within a particular subject;
- The need for teachers to facilitate students in appreciating the subtle differences between various subject discourses;
- The need for both teachers and students to appreciate the difference between 'school talk' and 'non-school talk' so as to develop a two-way relationship between theoretical knowledge and common-sense knowledge;
- The importance of clearly defined assessment criteria based on the ability of the students to integrate knowledge.

4.3. Cross-curricular Tasks and Self-esteem

4.3.1. Conflicting Definitions of Self-esteem

In this section I examine ways that cross-curricular tasks might contribute to the personal effectiveness dimension of empowerment through increasing the self-esteem of young people. The first stated goal of Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curricular student tasks is *to develop students' confidence and self-esteem* (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 2.). Feelings based on an informed evaluative estimate of oneself are an important element in the personal effectiveness of an individual. It is a great source of strength for a person to accept one's shortcomings while appreciating one's attributes and particularly one's unique worth as a human being. A person who is not informed by a realistic assessment of her/his own strengths and weaknesses is in danger not only of future disillusionment but also of disempowerment through indiscriminate manipulation by unscrupulous marketing and politicking forces.

There have been many definitions of the term 'self-esteem', some of which are contradictory. Scott et al. (1996) distinguished between self-concept, which was non-judgemental as opposed to self-esteem, which was self-evaluative. The California State Department of Education (1990:1) definition of self-esteem appeared to subsume what Hodkinson (1994) defined as personal effectiveness. Not only did it include the evaluative process of "appreciating one's own worth and importance" but it also included "having the character to be accountable for oneself and to act responsibly towards others" (Scott et al. 1996:286). On the other hand Humphreys (1993) stressed the emotional dimensions, "the feeling of being lovable and the feeling of being capable" as being central to self-esteem without any reference to reasoned self-evaluation. For the purposes of this research I propose to equate self-esteem with

feelings based on informed self-evaluation.

4.3.2.School Related Factors

It is generally accepted that the self-concept is already substantially formed before children enter school. While the most significant influence on a person's self-esteem is the family, the influence of the school cannot be ignored. Hoge et al. (1990) identified a combination of school factors, family and innate intelligence as the essential ingredient in increasing students' opinions of their own worth during their years at school. It is difficult to understand why they did not also include the local community in which students were living as a further factor. Research has indicated a definite relationship between various aspects of self-perceptions and a variety of school-related variables (Scott et al.1996). In a study of second level schools in Ireland, Smyth (1999) identified a number of factors influencing pupils' academic self-image, pupils' sense of control over their own lives, and pupils' body image. She identified the main factors as student/teacher interactions, gender, class, ability level of student and school discipline. There appeared to be general agreement among commentators, Stipek (1984), Amundson (1991), that children's self-esteem decreased as they proceeded through the school system. Scott et al. (1996) claimed that students' self-esteem was affected by the daily evaluations not only from teachers but also from their peers.

The quality of student/teacher interaction appears to be a major influence on student self-esteem. Positive interactions with teachers were reported by Smyth (1999) as increasing pupils' academic self-image while negative interactions had the opposite effect. Pupils also perceived themselves to have a greater sense of control over their own lives where they had a good relationship with their teachers, whereas those who had negative interactions with their teachers tended to be "more fatalistic". Also pupils

who enjoyed positive interactions with their teachers tended to have more positive views of their own personal appearance than those who did not. Smyth (1999) reported that while the quality of relationship with teachers and peers played a vital role in pupil development, formalised pastoral programmes did not. Humphreys (1993:140) claimed that there "are teachers who, because of their own self-esteem problems have had devastating effects on the self-esteem of their students". Quinlan (1998) claimed that it was very difficult for a teacher with low self-esteem to encourage pupils to develop high self-esteem. He argued that a successful teacher needed to be deeply committed to self-development.

There has been extensive research in USA on the influence of teachers on student self-esteem. Scott et al. (1996) reported that the results indicated that teacher support and encouragement of student autonomy were associated with higher student self-esteem. Scott et al. (1996) were reporting on a study they had carried out to examine similarities and differences in perceptions of school administrators, counsellors and teachers about student self-esteem. They claimed that very few school personnel had an accurate understanding of their impact on student self-esteem. The results of the study showed that all three groups agreed that the three outstanding characteristics of students with high self-esteem were :

- being responsible and dependable;
- having a sense of direction and autonomy;
- having a sense of self-assuredness.

Administrators, counsellors and teachers all agreed that the development of good social skills was indicative of high self-esteem. Scott et al. (1996) identified a number of implications for practice in the light of their research findings. There were grounds for designing curricula aimed at fostering a sense of responsibility. There was a need for

closer links between family and school in helping students to build self-esteem. There was a need for teachers and administrators to clarify their own perceptions of student self-esteem and the impact of these perceptions on students. Scott et al. (1996) referred to the work of Coleman (1961); Estep, Willower and Licata (1980); Licata and Wildes (1980) and Ryan and Grolnick (1986) indicating that the more a school was perceived as being characterised by student participation in decision making, mutual respect, self-discipline, interaction and flexibility the more likely it was to be a vehicle for promoting self-esteem.

Scott et al. (1996) claimed that one of the most overlooked methods of fostering self-esteem was the impact of modelling high self-esteem. They quoted the California State Department of Education Report (1990:292) that children who exhibited high self-esteem often had parents who exhibited high self-esteem and speculated that "school personnel who exhibit high self-esteem may also serve as important role models". Humphreys (1993), who based his work on self-esteem on his own life experiences in Ireland as a teacher and as a clinical psychologist, stressed the power of modelling in relation to self-esteem. He claimed that parents and teachers with high self-esteem would encourage high self-esteem in their children, while those with low self-esteem would reflect negatively on the self-esteem of the children in their care.

Smyth (1999) reported that in second level schools in Ireland girls tended to have lower academic self-images than boys. In general girls tended to perceive that they had a lower sense of control over their lives than boys did. Girls were found to have significantly lower body images than boys. The type of school attended did not appear to affect girls' body image, which was consistently lower than that of boys. There is a significant difference between the contexts in which girls implemented cross-curricular tasks in all girls schools and in co-educational schools due to the fact that

girls tended to be greatly outnumbered in Leaving Certificate Applied class groups in the latter.

Smyth (1999) reported that pupils from middle-class backgrounds in Ireland tended to have higher academic self-image than those from working-class backgrounds. Pupils from a working-class background, who were in schools that were predominantly working-class tended to be more self-confident than those in schools that were predominantly middle-class. Pupils from a middle-class background felt a greater sense of control over their own lives and a greater sense of being able to cope with difficulties that arose than their counterparts from working-class backgrounds. Pupils from working-class backgrounds tended to have more negative views of their personal appearance than their middle-class counterparts. The majority of students who follow Leaving Certificate Applied courses tend to come from working class backgrounds.

Smyth (1999) reported that lower ability pupils especially those, who were in remedial classes, felt a very low level of control over their own lives. The great majority of students following Leaving Certificate Applied courses (1995-!997) came from disadvantaged backgrounds and performed poorly at Junior Certificate level. Kelleghan et al.(1995) claimed that the strongest predictors of disadvantage in relation to progress at school in Ireland were the educational environment of the home, the level of education of the mother and the relative poverty of the family.

Smyth (1999) reported that pupils, who either felt their schooling was being disrupted by unruly behaviour or that the code of discipline was too strict, tended to have poor academic self-image. This finding highlights the difficulty for teachers to maintain a balance in developing a code of acceptable behaviour that would create an orderly, yet flexible learning environment favourable to improving the self-image of the young people involved. Traditionally in schools good discipline was characterised by

an orderly classroom dominated by the teacher with scant regard for the feelings of individual class members. Teachers, who are reluctant to change from didactic teaching for fear they will lose control, tend to have difficulty in adapting to self-directed student tasks. Where students are not interested in what the teacher is anxious to teach, there tends to be a serious breakdown of discipline leading to the alienation of both students and teachers together with a deteriorating self-evaluation of all concerned. Disciplinary problems need to be analysed by teachers as learning situations with a capability of enriching their own professionalism as teachers.

In their early years children look to their parents as the source of all knowledge. In adolescence they tend to distance themselves from their parents whom they feel know little or nothing. This distancing appears to be exacerbated by the lack of knowledge on the part of parents of what their offspring are studying in school especially in situations where the majority of parents had left school at an early age. External Evaluation identified one of the positive outcomes of the first phase of SPIRAL project (1978-82), that I directed, as the increased level of discussion in the home regarding Community Based Learning compared to 'ordinary school'.

> *The experience of this programme in obtaining and sustaining parents' interest is a particularly significant for the work of SPIRAL* (Ireland1984:102).

The sustained interest was attributed to the regular meetings of parents and teachers. I personally attended many of those meetings, where parents (mostly mothers) regularly expressed their satisfaction that they felt confident in discussing school matters with their offspring for the first time in years. Unfortunately regular parent/teacher meetings did not continue once the halo effect of the innovation faded. Attendance at parent/teacher meetings became a major industrial relations issue subsequently. At an EC conference in Dun Laoghaire in September 1981 I presented a video report on

SPIRAL with particular reference to Community Based Learning supported by Local Liaison networks, in which I claimed that parents were the most under-utilised educational resource in second-level schools in Ireland at that time. The subsequent establishment by the Minister for Education of national parent councils as statutory bodies has done little to promote the interaction of parents and teachers in the teaching / learning process. On the contrary interaction between individual teachers and parents in some ways has become more difficult as the position has become polarised between two pressure groups with conflicting agendas. A significant development has been the establishment of the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme in the early nineteen nineties aimed at addressing the needs of disadvantaged families. The scheme aimed to take initiatives aimed at giving parents more power over their own lives and to affirm the knowledge and skills that they possess in relation to the education of their children. The scheme was introduced to 13 second level schools in 1991 and has been extended gradually to an increasing number of schools over the past decade. It appears to be concentrating on parents of children who are involved in various types of remedial programmes at junior cycle level. While Humphreys (1993) stressed the need for greater interaction between teachers and parents he accepted that some teachers dread parent/teacher meetings, and many parents also feel uncomfortable about them.

4.3.3. Emotions and Learning

One's emotional state greatly influences the quality of one's learning. Humphreys (1993) claimed that a young person with high self-esteem retained a natural curiosity for learning and welcomed a challenge whereas the one of middle or low self-esteem dreaded learning as a means of risking more failures.

Success or failure in themselves have no effect on a child's motivation to learn

but the reactions of parents, teachers and other significant adults to success and failure can have a devastating effect (Humphreys1993: 6).

Humphreys recommended that parents should put an emphasis on effort and not on performance. On the other hand he warned that while unrealistic demands lead to low self-esteem, not making any demands had the same negative effect.

The emotional dimension is particularly important in experiential learning. Postle (1993) referred to Herron's model of a multi-modal learning pyramid in which practical, conceptual and imaginal modes are all based on an affective, emotional mode. Postle decried the manner in which the affective mode had been ignored down through the centuries. Boud et al. (1993) stressed the importance of self-confidence and self-esteem in learning from experience.

Unless learners believe themselves capable, they will be continually handicapped in what they do. Engagement with learning tasks is related to belief in success (p.15).

Boud et al. (1993) also stressed the need to be realistic about one's learning.

We also need to be challenged so that we do not fool ourselves with our own distorted assumptions or fail to consider new information, which is outside our present range of experience (ibid.).

Fear of failure can be a serious demotivational force in the learning process. Cockett and Callaghan (1996) provide helpful insights regarding the way self-worth could limit achievement. They reported on a study they had done on the perceptions and attitudes of young people in Manchester, UK, who had just failed to reach A-level entry requirements. A total of 37 students from four colleges in the Greater Manchester area participated – two sixth form groups and two further education groups. While the students might question their level of commitment at school, they were reasonably well

motivated regarding the courses in which they were engaged at the time of the interviews. The work of Covington (1992), Harter (1993) and others on the effects of motivation was the source of a frame used by Cockett and Callaghan to do part of the analysis of the interviews. Covinton's theory of self-worth assumed that the dominating drive was for self-acceptance and that in schools this was most often equated with the ability to achieve competitively. Cockett and Callaghan (1996) referred to Harter's (1993) work on low esteem of adolescents, which she had ascribed to perceived poor performance in what were considered to be important areas such as scholastic competence; athletic competence; social acceptance; behavioural conduct and physical appearance. They said that Covington proposed that the high value placed on academic performance resulted in a variety of behaviours aimed at preserving self-worth in the face of possible failure. Some students deliberately did not try, or if they did, they pretended that they had not, as the explanation for failure with which they were most comfortable was lack of effort (Cockett & Callaghan 1996). The interviews conducted by Cockett and Callaghan (1996:56) did not show that any of the interviewees had low self-esteem but that in maintaining self-esteem they might engage in "behaviour which either directly or indirectly limits achievement". None of the students ascribed their poor performance to a general lack of ability. Most students explained their poor results as due to lack of effort. They were also inclined to attribute their lack of success to a wide range of external factors over which they personally had not control. In summary, it appears to be a vicious circle where the quality of learning is determined by the level of self-esteem of learners, but many people are demotivated to learn for fear of failure and consequent loss of self-esteem.

4.3.4. Potential Impact of Cross-curricular Tasks on Self-esteem

The potential impact of cross-curricular tasks on the self-esteem of participants may be determined on the basis of the contribution they make to factors that are conducive to the development of increased self-esteem. Theoretically, it may be assumed that cross-curricular tasks have the capacity to enhance the self-esteem of students to the extent that that they contribute to:

- improving the quality of student/teacher interactions;
- facilitating students to take a more proactive role in decision making;
- facilitating students in taking greater responsibility for their own work;
- enabling students to practise communications and social skills so as to be able to relate better particularly to other people of all ages;
- enabling students to develop and practise self-appraisal skills.

4.4. Employability

4.4.1. Nature of Work

Before addressing the question of personal effectiveness with particular reference to employability, it is necessary to consider the part work plays in the lives of people. In a philosophical sense it is possible to describe work as an essentially contested concept (Walsh 1993). Down through the years there has been a great variety of views on work (Corson 1991c). The Hebrews, Greeks and Romans despised all manual work. The Renaissance view was quite different. Luther saw work as an essential part of life and valuable in its own right. The Protestant view placed the value not on work itself but on the religious rewards associated with it. The humanistic view, as stated by Kropotkin and quoted in 1919 by Bertrand Russell (Chomsky 1991), held that work was a physiological necessity that people could be encouraged to enjoy under a particular set of conditions. Attfield (1984) claimed that work was a vital component of the human essence by concluding that Marx's premise was true: free and creative productive activity, of the type provided by meaningful work, is an essential human capacity (Corson 1991a:20).

Pope John Paul II (1981) presented the Roman Catholic view in his encyclical, Laborem Exercens. He said that work is of decisive importance in that it is a fundamental dimension of humanity's existence on earth. He based his definition of work on the quotation from the Book of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it". The Pope claimed that work is objectively "what a human being does when dominating the earth" (Donders 1996:45).

The Pope drew a very clear distinction between work in the objective sense and work in the subjective sense. He claimed that more attention should be paid to the one who works rather than to the work that is being done.

> *Human persons and not what they do determine the dignity of work. This does away with the division of people into classes according to the work they do. Work can be classified and rated, but the measure of the value of any work remains the human being, who is its 'subject'. Work is in the first place 'for the worker' and not the worker 'for work'. Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out. It is always the human being who counts, even if the work is the most monotonous or alienating* (Donders 1996:46).

The Pope's views are particularly relevant in Ireland where 95% of the population are nominally Roman Catholic. However it appears that the Pope's Christian gospel of work is not taken very seriously in Ireland at the end of the 20th century in a booming economy driven mainly by multinational corporations (Bohan & Kennedy 1999, 2000). It is necessary to remember the two views of work illustrated by the Book of Genesis (Trant 1999). On the one hand there is the glory of sharing in God's work of creation, while on the other hand work can be seen as a curse, a punishment for sin.

Work may be classified in a number of ways. Corson (1991c) rejected the sociological distinction between 'work' and 'recreation' and preferred to refer to occupational and recreational work. He went on to subdivide occupational work into two types: constrained and unconstrained. The two are not to be seen as compartmentalised categories but rather as polarised extremes on a spectrum of occupational work.

White (1997) classified work as autonomous and heteronomous. Autonomous work is undertaken freely under one's own direction and has an end product that is of importance to the worker. On the other hand heteronomous work is a constrained activity, where the workers have very little control over the kind of activity that they are

required to do and have no particular interest in the product of the work. Again it is perceived that there is an overlap between the two. The common factor of both classifications is the level of constraint on the worker. At one extreme the level of constraint is so low that occupational work and recreational work are equally satisfying for the persons involved. At the other extreme the level of constraint is so overpowering that people find occupational work degrading and alienating.

White (1997) questioned assumptions regarding the centrality of work that are generally accepted by people at different points on the ideological spectrum - Christian, Capitalist, Marxist. He expressed surprise that so few philosophers had questioned the centrality of work in the lives of people. He listed a number of recent developments that have challenged the concept of the centrality of work. High rates of unemployment are being accepted as a permanent phenomenon. Many people are opting for part-time jobs in areas of particular interest to themselves. An increase in the numbers opting for early retirement coupled with a general increase in longevity has resulted in an increasing proportion of the population not being engaged in heteronomous work. The goal of a permanent job for life is no longer generally available and the movement from job to job is becoming the norm. The traditional view of a 'vocation' in life is being undermined.

4.4.2. Impact of Changing Economies

During recent years there have been profound changes in the nature of work. On the one hand Gorz was saying in the early 1980s that the working class was gone and was being replaced by the neo-proletariat, made up of permanently unemployed people and people in short-term jobs with little security (Giddens 1986). On the other hand Berryman and Bailey (1992) described the change from a system of mass production

based on low skill workers working in very constrained situations to a more flexible working environment that demanded more and more workers with higher skills. Rapidly changing economies are putting increasing pressure on education systems to adapt to the emerging needs of a future labour force. Ireland is a good example of such an economy. The Irish economy has undergone enormous change since the 1960s. Agriculture has declined significantly and hi-tech industry and services have grown dramatically. By the mid-eighties there had been a substantial decline in unskilled manual employment. By March 1985 it was estimated that "over half of those working or previously employed in unskilled manual jobs were unemployed" (Hannan 1986:7). In the mid-1980s the magnitude of the unemployment problem facing early school leavers had risen to a frightening extent (Hannan 1986:10). As the economy grew since the late eighties the annual average seasonally adjusted standardised unemployment rate has steadily decreased from 17% in both 1985 and 1986 to 11.5% in 1996, to 5.6% in 1999 and to 4.6% in April 2000 (CSO Ireland News Services July 2000). Ireland has been transformed from a society endeavouring to promote growth to one that is having great difficulty coping with unprecedented growth and all the accompanying opportunities/problems depending on how the people respond (Collins 2000). The national problem of unemployment has been replaced by a national shortage of skilled workers that has forced the government to organise major recruitment campaigns in a number of Asian countries. The problem of youth unemployment has now been replaced by the twin problem of upskilling young people to meet the challenges of increasingly hi-tech jobs and enabling those people, who are not progressing satisfactorily at school, to resist the temptation of being lured into low paid dead-end service jobs with the high risk of long-term unemployment in adult life.

4.4.3. New Perspectives on Employability

Personal effectiveness regarding employability relates to the nature of work available to a particular person at a particular time and place and to that person's ability to find work that is not unduly constraining. The main aim of the great majority of young people that I have spoken to in the course of this research was to get a job with a future. Some were anxious to get out into the workplace as quickly as possible while others aspired to continue in formal education with a view to getting the highest possible qualification and the quality of lifestyle that goes with it. Whichever route they choose they will eventually have to confront the question of their employability. This was a relatively straightforward matter in the middle of the 20th century. It was a question of getting a job and provided one worked honestly one could look to the future with a reasonable amount of security. But that is no longer true.

> *The implicit agreement that employers provide security and promotion in exchange for hard work and commitment (the old psychological contract) has been shattered. Rapid change and restructuring, involving redundancies on a massive scale has virtually eliminated the security and promotion side of it* (Cooper 1997:179).

Employability is now a volatile characteristic that one needs to begin to nurture at school and continue to do so throughout one's working life whether that is to be lived in a Neo-Fordist 'market' economy or in a Post-Fordist 'magnet' economy (Brown and Lauder 1997) or in an amalgam of both.

> *Students should be given the opportunity to explore for themselves the meaning of work, to reflect on this experience, to learn to work autonomously, to know the difference between good work and bad, to be critical of the kind of jobs on offer and to have some idea of how existing work patterns can be changed for*

the better. Not everything that is called work deserves that title, nor should schools encourage their students to accept every job on offer. This may sound like heresy, but we should never forget that schools should always be prepared to challenge the status quo in the interests of empowering their students (Trant and Ó Donnabháin 1998:87).

Cooper (1997) recommended that in the present economic climate an individual required an employability strategy that is informed by a future vision. The strategy needs to be based on a belief that an individual owns one's own future and that one cannot be dependent on any organisation to guard one's security. Secondly, one must be prepared to learn self-management skills and devise ways of improving one's own employability. Central to one's employability are the core skills identified by Dearing (1996): communication; the application of number; and information technology together with a capacity for critical thinking.

The employability of young people raises ongoing questions about the relevance of the curriculum. Saunders (1991) warned of the dangerous assumption of common needs being shared by schools, students and employers. She claimed that the chances of a mismatch of needs between the three groups were much more likely. She warned that schools were preoccupied with their own internal constraints of reorganisation, while there was great danger in taking employers' needs for granted. Wellington (1994) reiterated Saunders' warning regarding the difficulty of getting a coherent picture of employers' needs. McGeachy (2000) referred to a recent survey that predicted that "the ability to attract and retain the best people would be the primary force influencing business strategy by 2005" (p.30). She identified the three elements that successful employers would be seeking to develop in their workforce in the future - competence, commitment and an ability to work as part of a team. In the mid-1990s

the Irish Business Enterprise Consortium used its Business and Education Links Project to inform second level students of what it considered to be the qualities of a good employee. The list was presented to students in the following order: reliable; honest; sense of humour; willingness to try new things; self-motivated; caring; patient; can work as part of a team; flexible; can take responsibility; hardworking; has initiative and creativity; punctual; good communicator; sociable (i.e. warm, friendly). Students were required to rank the qualities in order of importance for different occupations as part of their career education activities (IBEC / AIB Bank, undated). The exercise was rather unreal as unfortunately IBEC was not prepared to facilitate schools in implementing work experience placements as part of its Business and Education Links project. While it is helpful for young people to be aware of what employers are saying, it is more important to be aware of the volatility of market forces and of the need for them to take ownership of their own futures and take whatever steps possible to manage it proactively.

4.4.4. Employability and Literacy

While the flexible well-educated workforce is cited as one of the causes of the recent dramatic growth of the Irish economy (Ireland 1998a), the Green Paper (Ireland 1998b) on adult education expressed concern at the extent to which the literacy levels of the Irish adult population compared unfavourably with other OECD countries.

> *A low-skill workforce will also be a low productivity workforce (Ireland 1998b:33).*

The Green Paper argued that national competitiveness demanded a systematic proactive approach to upgrade skills. It accepted that as wages rose in the booming Irish economy the danger of companies in the low skill/manufacturing sector being attracted

to low-wage economies increased.

> *This persistent threat to the employment prospects of low skilled manufacturing workers is best addressed by increasing their skill levels (ibid.).*

Robinson (1997) reported that there was evidence that low levels of literacy and numeracy harmed an individual's chances on the labour market in United Kingdom.

> *There is a strong case for putting more emphasis on improvements in literacy and numeracy at the lower end of the attainment scale (p.3).*

The Final International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) Report (OECD 2000) that covered twenty-two countries stressed the dual role of workplace literacy. The report explained that people with higher level literacy skills have better employment prospects than those with lower literacy level skills. It also stressed that jobs that entail much writing and reading enable workers to raise their literacy levels or at least maintain them on the job

> *Often these two aspects of workplace literacy reinforce each other: skills learned in school facilitate in engaging more frequently in complex activities in the workplace that in turn build skills* (OECD 2000:54).

The report stressed the likelihood of people with low literacy skills being unemployed.

> *Once in the labour market individuals with low literacy skills ... face an increasing likelihood of being unemployed ... In many countries – Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Finland, New Zealand, Slovenia and United Kingdom – the incidence of unemployment is twice as high among adults with low (literacy) skills than among adults with medium to high skills* (OECD 2000:55).

Ireland has particular problems relating to literacy. In the first phase of the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), carried out in Canada,

Germany, France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United States and Ireland in 1995, the performance by Irish participants was poor. The study covered five levels of literacy in three domains: prose literacy; document literacy and quantitative literacy.

> *Prose literacy – the knowledge and skills that are required to understand and use information from newspapers, fiction and expository text;*
>
> *Document literacy – the knowledge and skills that are required to locate and use the information contained in official forms, timetables, maps and charts;*
>
> *Quantitative literacy – the knowledge and skills that are required to apply mathematical operations in printed materials* (Morgan, Hickey, and Kelleghan 1997:vii).

The percentage of Irish participants who were at the lowest level of literacy was 25% compared to 10% in Netherlands and 6% in Sweden. The only other country that performed worse than Ireland was Poland. Workers in Ireland said that they were involved in four kinds of reading activities on a weekly basis in the course of their work. The level of involvement in writing activities was similar. Nearly one third of Irish workers said that they performed mathematical activities such as calculations and measurement daily in the course of their work. Workers in a wide variety of occupations said that they performed many literacy activities regularly. Irish workers appeared to be less involved in reading and writing at work than their counterparts in other countries, while they appeared be on a par with them in relation to mathematical activities. Very few (5%) believed that their advancement at work was being hindered by lack of literacy skills. However the tests showed that people, who thought their skills were adequate, had in fact very low levels of literacy (Morgan et al. 1997).

The Final IALS Report referred to the different levels of provision of adult education and training. Countries fell into three different categories, the Nordic

countries where lifelong learning was "a reality for a large segment of the population"; the majority of countries with a rate of participation around 40% and a group of countries where "lifelong learning is a less common activity". The report placed Ireland in the third category.

> *Chile, Hungary, Poland and Portugal have rates below 20 per cent whereas those of Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia are in the 20-30 per cent range* (OECD 2000:60).

Dónal de Buitléir, who chaired The Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places in Ireland, stated in January 2000 that this statistic puzzled members of the committee.

> *This puzzled the committee, as our experience would suggest otherwise – many people in their late 20s and 30s are pursuing courses of all kinds. The statistics quoted relate to full-time mature students, while the vast majority of mature students pursue part-time courses* (de Buitléir 2000).

The Green Paper, *Adult Education in an era of Lifelong Learning*, referred to the disparity in levels of participation in adult education of people with different literacy levels.

> *In Ireland 10.7% of those with literacy Level 1 took part in Adult Education compared with 55.3% at Levels 4 and 5.*
>
> *91.1% of those with only primary education did not participate compared with 45.8% of college graduates* (Ireland 1998b:31).

The Green Paper stressed the need for a comprehensive adult education strategy, effectively targeted at those most in need. It stressed the importance of literacy skills for participation in a modern knowledge based economy.

> *Literacy not only provides the tools for participation in a functional,*

instrumental sense; it is also central to self-image, self-esteem and personal confidence (Ireland 1998b:32).

The Green Paper referred to the issues that the relationship between low levels of initial education and participation in adult education raised. It challenged the assumptions that adult education could compensate for low levels of literacy among school leavers. It raised the worry that adult education could increase inequality in society rather than combat it, if there were lower levels of participation by disadvantaged people. It emphasised the importance of the quality of school experience as a vital factor in determining the quality of a person's lifelong learning (Ireland 1998b).

4.4.5. Addressing Literacy across the Curriculum

Bruce and Wasser (1996) examined three underlying models on which a variety of approaches to literacy across the curriculum in USA were based: Skills model; Instrumental model and Inquiry model. The Skills model is based on the belief that reading is a set of specific skills that one has to learn first, before they can begin reading to learn. It is associated with a transmission approach to the teaching / learning process. The Instrumental model places the process of reading a particular text in the centre of two sets of activities that may be described as prereading and postreading activities. A variety of prereading activities aimed at activating prior knowledge and generating the learners' interest in the text. Postreading activities, including writing, discussion and additional reading, focused on applying whatever is learned from the text across the curriculum. While some people operated the Instrumental model from a constructivist view of learning, others used it from a transmission approach. In the Inquiry model reading was important "but it is no longer the centre of the learning" (Bruce and Wasser

1996:289). The Inquiry model started from the assumption that knowledge was constructed from some meaningful activity. It tended to be student driven, beginning from what the student already knew. It did not have to begin with reading but with whatever form of inquiry was most appropriate. Acquisition of knowledge and increased proficiency in reading probably occurred but they happened as a by-product of what was in itself a meaningful activity.

> *Skills and facts may be addressed in isolation, but it is crucial that in doing so one supports, rather than detracts from the immediate experience. Thus, one should not separate 'learning to read' from 'reading to learn'* (Bruce and Wasser:290).

Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curicular tasks provide a setting for both the Inquiry and the Instrumental models of addressing literacy across the curriculum. The Inquiry model appears to be suitable for people, who have attained a certain basic level of literacy to improve their skills. The Instrumental model, appeared to have been appropriate for students with serious literacy problems. Teachers could assist in selecting appropriate reading material after the student had succeeded in deciding for herself/himself on the problem that s/he wished to research. There was a danger that the difficulty of being able to provide appropriate reading material might result in the teacher giving a student a 'problem' to research which was not really a problem for the particular student at all (Bigge & Shermis 1992).

4.4.6. Role of Cross-curricular Tasks in improving Employability

The potential impact of cross-curricular tasks on the employability of participants may be determined on the basis of the contribution they make to factors that are conducive to the development of increased employability. Theoretically it may be assumed that

cross-curricular tasks contribute to the employability of young people by:

- Increasing the self-confidence and self-assuredness that is necessary for one to take responsibility for her/his own employability;
- Improving literacy, numeracy and information communication technology skills;
- Improving self-organisational skills such as planning, decision-making and time management;
- Improving collaborative skills necessary for working as part of a team;
- Developing self-appraisal skills to assess realistically her/his existing and potential abilities in the context of a rapidly changing economic environment;
- Developing reflective observation skills necessary to interrogate contemporary workplaces and work practices;

In so far as cross-curricular tasks have a potential capacity to increase an individual's self-esteem and increase an individual's employability they can theoretically make a significant contribution to improving an individual's personal effectiveness, one of the three elements of empowerment (Hodkinson 1994).

4.5. Helping Young People to think for themselves

4.5.1. Critical Thinking and Empowerment

Critical thinking was one of the three pillars on which Hodkinson (1994) based his theory of empowerment, the others being personal effectiveness and consciousness of community. He claimed that all young people had the right to develop their critical abilities through the educational process. For him critical thinking involved the use of theory as a tool of analysis, developing an understanding of the connections between different specialisms, examining critically the contexts within which people were living and developing a moral / ethical perspective. He stressed the need to take the moral/ethical perspective seriously to ensure that empowerment was not distorted into selfishness.

Nisbet & Davies (1990) stated that there were reasonable grounds for believing that the quality of thinking could be improved by appropriate teaching, but that there was not agreement as to what that should be. They identified three aspects of emerging trends that were attracting interest in research and development:

- *the radical change implied for pedagogical style and the teacher's role;*
- *assessment, how to test critical thinking;*
- *disposition, the motivational aspects of thinking, the wish to use the skills of thinking, the influence of culture* (Nisbet and Davies 1990:49).

4.5.2. Knowledge and Learning

Knowledge may be subdivided into three different types: common-sense knowledge; practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge (Pring 1976, 1995). Common-sense knowledge is based on the facts and assumptions that one hears in day to day discourse. One acquires common-sense knowledge from family members, from peers, from

television, from teachers, from employers as one goes through life without making a conscious effort.

> *What characterises common-sense knowledge is not so much what is believed but the way it is believed – unquestionably, without reference to reasons, as self-evident and uncontroversial, shared with the group with whom one identifies* (Pring 1995:144).

One's common-sense knowledge is very much influenced by the culture within which one is growing up.

Theoretical knowledge goes beyond common-sense knowledge in that it is based on questioning, reflecting, interpreting and analysing evidence, and drawing conclusions. It is not distinct from common-sense knowledge (Lawton 1975) and is often a refinement of it as a result of a structured interrogation. Pring (1976) argued for "a recognition of the common-sense language and understandings through which pupils already engage in this mental life and to which the more disciplined modes of enquiry must be related" (p.120). The resulting theoretical knowledge is based on reasoned evidence and can be stated in propositions. Kolb (1993) described the positive manner in which theoretical knowledge and common-sense knowledge can interact with one another.

> *Common-sense requires the criticism of refined knowledge, and refined knowledge requires the security of common sense, suggesting that all social knowledge requires an attitude of partial scepticism in its interpretation* (Kolb 1993:155).

Practical knowledge is about 'knowing how' as opposed to 'knowing that'. Practical knowledge is demonstrated by performance of specific activities rather than by an ability to state propositions about the activity. There is an ongoing tension between

practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Both are related. Much theoretical knowledge is based on accepted practical activities that have brought about results over a long period of time. On the other hand existing practices can be improved significantly by referring to existing theoretical knowledge. Tension is understandable in that there are many people who are expert in the practical activity but who are not able to explicate the related theory coherently and the converse is equally true. Some people, who are extremely eloquent in discussing the theoretical side of particular activities, are not always as proficient in actually performing the activity. This leads to a division in many fields of human endeavour between the practitioners and the theoreticians and is a factor in the cultural gulf between academic and vocational education.

Participants in initial vocational courses have a foundation of common-sense knowledge as they are already functioning as members of their local community. They have a certain amount of practical knowledge but could possibly have difficulty in stating the theory relating to many of the activities in which they are proficient or are gaining in proficiency. The quality of their theoretical knowledge would vary greatly. Some would have developed a fund of interrelated concepts while others' conceptual development would be quite rudimentary. Yet, all have a right to think for themselves, form their own opinions and act in accordance with those opinions within very broad guidelines in a democracy.

> *Children, we must never forget, are not repositories for adult knowledge but organisms that, like all of us, are constantly trying to make sense of ... experience* (von Glasersfeld 1989:14).

The quality of the learning activity will be determined by the extent to which the learner is capable of organising her/his prior experiences as conceptual building blocks.

Central to that is the learner's capacity to interpret experiences. Von Glaserfeld (1989) stressed that "interpretation implies an awareness of more than one possibility, deliberation and rationally controlled choice" (p.13). Interpretation is not possible without reflection and the more abstract the concepts and operations become the greater is the need for reflective activity.

The challenge for the teacher is to try to establish the level of conceptual development reached by the learner and to decide on a model of adult conceptualisations to which the learning activity could lead. It is not helpful for the teacher to direct the learner autocratically as to what is to be done. The teacher's role is to facilitate by becoming a partner in the learning process, making comments, asking questions but not giving directions autocratically.

Walsh (1993) stressed the importance of literacy in mental development and the need to ensure that training in literacy and education in the use of literacy were not treated as separate activities.

> *The development of thoughtful, critical and self-critical modes of thought in various spheres of learning, including the political, is at the least greatly facilitated by the proper uses of reading and writing* (Walsh 1993:155).

Cross-curricular tasks appear to provide the context in which young people have an opportunity to use the reading and writing skills, they are acquiring, in formulating their thoughts and then evaluating them critically.

Cognitive interaction psychology states that the learning process entails a situation where a person and her/his psychological environment mutually interact with one another (Bigge & Shermis 1992). The concepts of *person*, *psychological environment*, and *interaction* are very helpful for teachers in describing learning processes.

They enable a teacher to see a person, the person's environment and the interaction between the two all occurring at once (Bigge and Shermis 1992:11).

Cognitive interactionists believe that people are inherently purposive in "that they do the best they know how for the welfare of whatever they conceive themselves to be" (Bigge & Shermis1992:148). Cognitive interactionists perceive individuals as dynamic persons who are constantly interacting with their surroundings in a reciprocal process and acting always on the basis of their own reasons. Cognitive interaction then is purposive action. It may be either thought or a combination of thought and behaviour. It is not an automatic action resulting from an impingement of a stimulus upon an organism. A person does not merely process information about the outcomes of his behaviour. Instead he/she integrates the information in order to make cognitive sense of matters involving himself and the world around him (Bigge & Shermis 1992:148). Cognitive interactionists contend that as a person attempts to interpret her/his environment, both the person and the environment are changed. Others may not observe the changes but both are changed from the perspective of the person her/ himself. The physical environment is changed in that it appears different to the person interacting with it. The person has also changed subtly in that s/he has developed new insights as a result of the interaction.

4.5.3. Experiential Learning

The process of experiential learning derived from cognitive interaction psychology. Kolb (1993) based his interpretation of experiential learning on the work of Lewin, Dewey, and Piaget. He defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb1993:155).

He stressed that learning is a continuous process whereby concepts are formulated and modified by experience. Full recognition is given to the concepts and conceptual systems that the learner brings with him to a particular learning experience. The new experience should challenge the learner to modify existing ideas or maybe to get rid of them altogether while taking new ideas on board. Kolb (1993) said that Piaget had identified two mechanisms by which new ideas are adopted by an individual – integration and substitution. Ideas that developed through integration became a stable part of a person's coherent view of the world, while concept changes by substitution could be the source of confused thinking. Kolb warned that learning is by its nature a conflict-filled process. He listed four modes of experiential learning, with which the successful learner has to come to terms – concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Some of those modes are in open conflict with one another for example, concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation; reflective observation and active experimentation. It is necessary for the successful learner to maintain a balance between the four modes.

> *Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment* (Kolb 1993: 148).

Experiential learning is much broader than classroom learning. It covers all walks of life, all age groups and all human situations. It is a holistic process whereby

people adapt to the world in which they live through learning. Kolb(1993) claimed that Dewey, Lewin and Piaget all accepted scientific method as their model for the learning process.

> *The scientific method, thus, provides a means for describing the holistic integration of all human functions. ... When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work portraying learning as a continuous lifelong process* (Kolb1993:150).

Experiential learning needs to involve transactions between the learner and the environment. It is worthy of note that Kolb prefers to use the word 'transaction' instead of 'interaction' in dealing with a person relating to her/his environment. He pointed out the dual meanings of the word 'experience'. One was personal and subjective, while the other was objective and environmental.

In subscribing to the view that learning is the process of creating knowledge, Kolb (1993) stressed that the process of knowledge creation occurred at all levels of sophistication. Nobody enters a learning situation with a blank mind. People have already some ideas. Some people's ideas may be very crude while those of others might be more sophisticated. The starting point of learning has to be at whatever point the learner is. Experiential learning consists of modifying existing ideas or in some cases discarding them as well as embracing new ideas. Kolb (1993) expressed surprise that so few researchers had adverted to the close intimate relationship between learning and knowledge as Piaget had emphasised in his work.

Boud et al. (1993) formulated a series of five propositions in relation to experiential learning.

1. Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning (Boud, Cohen,

and Walker D. 1993:8).

They argue that experience is inextricably linked to learning. There cannot be any learning unless the personal experience of the learner is engaged. Teachers and educational technology can help but they only do so by transforming the experience of the learner. Teaching of itself does not necessarily lead to learning but rather the experiences that the teacher helps to create. Every experience provides an opportunity for learning. Learners bring the fruits of previous experiences to every learning situation which can either be motivational or otherwise. While learning is inextricably linked to experience, it does not happen automatically. There needs to be a conscious engagement with the experience through reflection, both as an individual activity and as a group activity, leading to abstraction and conceptualisation.

2.Learners actively construct their experience (Boud et al.1993:10).

Boud et al. emphasise that learners construct their own experience while Kolb stressed that learners created their own knowledge. When we consider that Boud et al. claimed that experience and learning were inextricably linked and Kolb's emphasis on the intimate relationship of learning to knowledge it is evident that all three are intertwined within each person. The construction of an experience embraces feelings as well as thinking. All experiences are subject to interpretation, which is influenced by the unique past of the individual together with his/her expectations, knowledge, attitude and emotions. Boud et al. (1993) recommended that teachers acknowledge the importance of the learner's construction of the learning activities that are being engaged in at any one time. They warned against the imposition of particular learning styles on learners, as cognisance must be taken of each person's unique history and ways of adapting to the world.

3.Learning is a holistic process (Boud et al.1993:12).

This proposition coincides with Kolb's view that learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Boud et al. (1993) warned about the dangers of failing to realise that in every learning experience there are elements of the cognitive, the conative and the affective.

4.Learning is socially and culturally constructed (Boud et al. 1993:13).

This proposition coincides with Kolb's view that learning involves transactions between the person and the environment. People construct their experiences in a particular context. They cannot do so outside a particular social setting and a particular range of cultural values. Critical reflection is required to interrogate assumptions and taken for granted value systems. It is necessary particularly to reflect critically on the usage of language, which is the most influential means of a learner being affected by his/her social and cultural context.

5.Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (Boud et al. 1993:14).

Feelings tend to be ignored in educational institutions. This is a serious neglect as feelings are an essential part of the learning process. Past experience generates feelings and emotions that influence the learner's expectations of his or her capabilities.

4.5.4. Work experience and Mini-enterprise

Work experience placements and mini-enterprises contain all the elements of experiential learning as clarified by Kolb(1994) and Boud (1993). There is a clearly defined experience that should act as a stimulus for learning. They give a young person an opportunity to adapt to the world around him/her. They build bridges across the young person's life situations. They enable the learners to carry out transactions

between themselves and their environment. Each work experience placement and mini-enterprise could be a holistic process in that each contains clearly defined elements of cognitive, conative and affective learning. They are very appropriate for an exploratory-understanding level of teaching in that they contain the two interlocking elements of investigation and reflective learning. Both work experience placements and mini-enterprise demand that the processes of problem stating and problem solving be completed if effective learning is to be maximised. Experiential learning commences as the learner identifies the disharmony in her/his thinking by raising a problem that s/he will proceed to solve following an analysis of the experience as perceived by himself/herself. The problem raising needs to be assisted by teachers supplying background information and raising different issues at the preparatory stage of either work experience placement or mini-enterprise. Through investigation and reflection, informed by theoretical knowledge learned in the context of modules or subjects currently or previously, the learner will identify a problem, decide on an action plan and proceed to solve the problem. Again the teachers have a specific role of facilitating the learners in reflecting on the experience, interpreting it, analysing it and encouraging them to draw conclusions from it, while respecting the right of the learners to have their own viewpoints.

The quality of learning related to work experience appears to have been very varied since its introduction to schools in United Kingdom and Ireland in the late 1970s. Berkely et al. (1990) were very critical.

> *The emphasis has all too often centred firmly on quantity rather than quality* (p.4).

The survey, which I personally conducted on behalf of the Department of Education in 1993, revealed a number of serious weaknesses in work experience practices in Irish

schools at that time such as

- The scarcity of what teachers considered to be suitable workplaces;
- The apparent lack of a coherent approach to the preparatory and debriefing stages of placements;
- The absence of ongoing inservice training for work experience co-ordinators;
- the low level of involvement of both employers and parents in the planning and evaluating of young people's learning related to work experience;
- the lack of involvement of teachers other than the co-ordinators in learning associated with work experience (Shannon Curriculum Centre 1993).

Shilling (1989) identified two factors above all others for a satisfactory learning experience in relation to work experience placements i.e. a good relationship between student and adult(s) from the world of work and the type of work that the student liked. Harris et al. (1997) reported on a qualitative study of work-related learning in a sample of sixteen schools in UK that had been selected as examples of good practice. They identified the features of work experience placements "where there was good reason to believe that the young person achieved significant learning".

- *The workplace was not one that was familiar to the young person, either through part-time work or family connections;*
- *The young person worked on real tasks that were to be found in the workplace;*
- *The young person worked with other adults who were employed in the workplace and did not have too much contact with other work experience pupils;*
- *The young person was given real responsibility for undertaking some work;*
- *The young person was allowed to concentrate on work tasks rather on through part-time work or family connections;*
- *The young person had an adult supervisor who had empathy with young people and*

who gave the student some feedback on her/his performance;

- *The placement had some clear focus that was understood by the school, the student and the immediate supervisor* (Harris et al. Section 7.5.4).

Harris et al. (1996/97) found that the debriefing stage of work experience placements had not been well done for three reasons. Teachers did not seem to know about debriefing procedures. Sufficient time had not been provided for debriefing as placements occurred at the end of term. There appeared to have been a general perception in schools that the experience itself was sufficient for learning to take place.

Gibb (1993) identified three elements that are necessary for significant learning to take place in the context of a mini-enterprise. First the classroom should incorporate what Gibb described as enterprise essences through giving the students ownership of the mini-enterprise, flexibility, responsibility, freedom to make mistakes, allowing for holistic experience in solving problems and focussing on the needs of the customer. Secondly, students should be required to carry out a variety of activities in a context of uncertainty. Third, the focus should be on learning by doing and discovery. Gibb (1993) suggested that students were likely to develop enterprising characteristics and attitudes if the above three elements existed in a mini-enterprise. He surmised that in formal schooling students could gain greater insight into knowledge from following a similar approach. In considering the learning possibilities associated with mini-enterprises, it is necessary to be aware also of the critics of enterprise education. Coffield (1990) was extremely critical. He said that it was not a well-defined concept but a farrago of 'hurrah' words like 'creativity', 'initiative' and 'leadership' (p.67). He was particularly critical of Gibb and the publications on enterprise from Durham University Business School (DUBS) for their failure to provide a balanced view on enterprise education. My experience of minicompanies in Ireland suggests that they

form an effective framework for the personal and social development of young people provided "teachers recognise and exploit the educational potential of situations as they arise" (Ó Donnabháin 1990:132).

4.5.5. Curriculum Integration

Cross-curricular tasks in the context of Leaving Certificate Applied were defined as practical activities by which learning was applied to a variety of situations. The policy makers stated that the tasks would "play a key role in providing a vehicle for curriculum integration" (Department of Education / National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 1.3.). The head of the Leaving Certificate Applied design team saw integration at two levels:

- At the level of teachers integration involved getting them to work together around common themes from the different perspectives of their subjects.
- At the level of students integration involved facilitating them to develop a coherent view of the world in which they are living.

> *The world does not come packaged into subjects or programmes at all. You are trying to break down those very false distinctions and enable them to have a school experience, which reflects their real life experience, which is an integrated experience* (Interview with Jim Gleeson, 28 July 1999, Appendix 4).

Participants in Leaving Certificate Applied are at a disadvantage in relation to those who follow the other two Leaving Certificate courses in the context of lifelong learning. As a result of 'ringfencing' they are denied access to Third Level courses. As a result the certification they receive is devalued on the labour market, inhibiting their chances of gaining access to positions that would provide learning opportunities in the course of their work. Many of them leave the formal education sector on completion of Leaving

Certificate Applied and join the labour market. Others, who continue within the formal education sector, will do so at a disadvantage, as they are confined to a narrow range of Post-Leaving Certificate courses. As a result they are forced to join the labour force in low-level jobs. Their opportunities of future learning are confined to education and training courses provided by statutory bodies such as Vocational Education Committees (VECs) or FÁS (the Industrial Training Authority) or community education initiatives organised by local groups in response to perceived needs. Consequently it appears logical that Leaving Certificate Applied should be regarded as much as a preparation for learning outside the formal schooling system as within it. Whichever route they take subsequently they have a right to learn how to learn while at school, if they are to have a place in a learning society of the future. For that reason schools have a responsibility to put a particular emphasis on integrative learning for young people who do not have access to Third Level. Leaving Certificate Applied is the last opportunity that formal schooling has to facilitate many young Irish people to learn how to conceptualise and to connect concepts in coherent generalisations.

There are many different interpretations of curriculum integration. Ingram (1979) lists fifteen interpretations of the term ranging from Bernstein (1975), who described integration as a social phenomenon reflecting changing patterns of power and authority in society to Hirst (1974) who implied that it is a characteristic of some subjects but not of others. Still the term is used frequently in educational discourse without being clearly defined. I submit that Ingram's (1979) interpretation of integration in the context of lifelong learning appears to be quite appropriate in the context of a modular prevocational programme such as Leaving Certificate Applied.

> ... ... *Particular ways of organising knowledge for curriculum purposes that counteract the tendency for knowledge to become fragmented and irrelevant,*

and assist pupils in developing and maintaining a coherent view of life (Ingram 1979:26).

In a very detailed typology of curriculum integration Ingram (1979) identified two main types: structural and functional.

In the structural category integration is conceived as a reorganisation of the structure of knowledge within the curriculum; in the functional category knowledge is viewed as a resource to be used for the promotion of integrative experiences (Ingram 1979:28).

Ingram (1979) identified three main uses that can be made of both types of integration, i.e. epistemological, psychological and social. He described the ways in which teachers can use integration in dealing with matters relating to knowledge, learning and social development.

In relation to knowledge, Ingram (1979) suggested that integration could help teachers to cope with changes in knowledge, with interrelating different areas of knowledge and with giving learners a sense of purpose. He described the ways in which integration helps to deal with the rapid expansion of knowledge, with the obsolescence of knowledge and the growing fragmentation of knowledge. He claimed that integration enabled people to cope with the increase in knowledge by being able to synthesise new knowledge in the form of key concepts and that integration helped people to cope with certain knowledge becoming obsolescent by enabling them to realise that factual knowledge needs to be constantly revised. He also claimed that integration of its very nature counteracted the fragmentation of knowledge through promoting a holistic view of the world that could help the learner to develop a clear sense of purpose in life.

Ingram (1979) claimed that integration could also provide a curriculum that is

conducive to learning and that will promote personality development through learning. He maintained that integration improved the quality of learning through incorporating the learner's interests. He said that integrative teaching provided greater scope for personal development in that the learner was encouraged to focus on matters that were of particular interest and that might relate to the individual's emotional and moral development. Linking learning with concrete experiences was a great source of motivation in that it provided learners with the opportunity of formulating their own thought patterns and enabled them to take an increasing amount of control over their own learning.

In relation to its social function integration could promote teaching and learning through sharing. He said that while competition was a feature of subject–based teaching, co-operation was the main characteristic of integrative teaching. He referred to the irony of individualism resulting from subject-based learning in large class groups while integrative teaching encouraged co-operation through individualisation. Ingram stressed the significant part curriculum integration had to play in the education of both young people and adults by introducing them to contemporary issues that can only be understood through a cross-curricular approach.

> ... *it can be affirmed that the kind of contribution that integration can make in this respect is a very positive one, for the issues are generally of a practical nature and of direct concern to the children themselves. If not dealt with through some form of integration, they would at best be misunderstood or at worst never dealt with at all* (Ingram 1979, 54).

Ingram(1979) also stressed the part played by curriculum integration in the establishing of links between schools and the world outside the school. He referred to the danger of a purely academic approach to learning dissociating knowledge from the

day-to-day lives of the learners. He asserted that integration had an inbuilt facility for merging the concerns of school with those of society.

For Bernstein (1975) integration meant something much more fundamental than interdisciplinary borrowing or transdisciplinary co-operation. Atkinson(1985) said that Bernstein believed that contemporary state schools in UK were in a state of transition from social arrangements consistent with mechanical solidarity to those associated with organic solidarity (p.25) and that integration was to be thought of as a reflection of change (p.147). Bernstein (1975) suggested that educational knowledge is realised through three message systems, curriculum (which he described as valid knowledge), pedagogy (which he described as valid transmission of knowledge) and evaluation (which he described as valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught). He identified two broad types of curriculum that he described as collection codes and integrated codes. In collection codes the contents are clearly bounded and separated from each other and the teachers are very much in control of what is being studied. In the integrated codes the contents stand in open relationship to each other and the level of control over what is being learned is shared to varying degrees between teachers and students. The contents of different syllabuses are not independent in an integrated code but subordinate to a particular idea that links them together in a particular manner.

> *Where we have integration the syllabus for a given content is subordinate to a general idea, which is itself subject to change* (Bernstein 1975:81)

Bernstein argued that in integrated codes the supra-content concept had to focus much more on general principles with the result that the pedagogy was likely to become more self-regulatory. He stressed the need to be clear about the term 'integrated'. He warned that one subject using the theories of another subject did not constitute integration.

> *Integration, as it is used here, refers minimally to the subordination of previously insulated subjects or courses to some relational idea, which blurs the boundaries between the subjects* (Bernstein 1975:93).

Stenhouse (1975) suggested that integration as discussed by Bernstein depended on the capacity of those involved to hold on to an open attitude to knowledge.

> *It depends on the abandonment of the idea of knowledge as a possession and a source of power to be dispensed grudgingly to those who accept the system hierarchy and are prepared to defer satisfaction* (Stenhouse 1975:49).

Atkinson (1985) referred to the educational philosophy embedded in each code. He said that in the integrated code there would be an increased emphasis on understanding ways of knowing with less emphasis on the assimilation of detailed facts. The integrated code implied a theory of teaching and learning conducive to an increased emphasis on self-directed learning while the collection code focused on the transmission of facts. Atkinson (1985) warned that while some actual curricula might approximate more closely to the collection or integrated codes than others, neither code would ever exist in a pure form in schools.

Bernstein (1975) distinguished between two types of integration, one based on an individual teacher who deliberately blurs the boundaries between different subjects and the other based on the work of a number of teachers who have agreed to collaborate. He explained that the strength of an integrated code depended on the number of teachers who became involved. He perceived that a movement from a collection code to an integrated code would lead to a disturbance of authority structures, existing educational identities and concepts of property.

Bernstein(1975) argued that the nature of teacher / student relationships would change significantly from one code to the other. Within the closely bounded collection

code individual teachers had the freedom to vary their approaches as they wished as long as they stayed within the clearly marked boundaries of their subjects. On the other hand he saw that the acceptance by a team of teachers of an integrated code would result in a movement towards a common pedagogy and a common form of evaluation. He envisaged a situation where an integrated code would result in teachers shedding their existing freedom to teach in their own individualistic manner in order to collaborate with their peers, while their students acquired greater discretion in deciding what they would study.

> *In other words there is a shift in the balance of power, in the pedagogical relationship between teacher and taught* (Bernstein 1975:101).

The introduction of integrated codes leads to a change in teacher relationships and in teacher identities. Existing loyalties to particular subjects could be weakened as people become involved in shared educational tasks.

> *The centre of gravity of the relationships between teachers will undergo a radical shift. Thus, instead of teachers and lecturers being divided and insulated by allegiances to subject hierarchies, the conditions for their unification exist through a common work situation* (Bernstein 1975:104).

Young (1998) defined two categories of integration, bureaucratic and connective. Bureaucratic integration consisted of attempting to link the existing clearly defined subjects of the second level curriculum so as to address matters relating to social and personal development of the young people involved. There are major obstacles to bureaucratic integration. As a principal, who had made attempts from time to time to address social and personal issues within the traditional Leaving Certificate, I would corroborate what Young (1998) claimed. The timetable is dominated by an

overloaded curriculum of insulated subjects that are competing fiercely with one another for student contact time. Social and personal 'subjects' tend to be squeezed into a limited number of slots in the timetable, and are the first to be encroached upon if the extra demands of the priority examination subjects such as Higher Level Mathematics are acceded to at particular times. Bureaucratic integration inevitably leads to placing social and personal development on the periphery of the curriculum despite the best efforts of school administrators to maintain a balance between the demands of subjects and of the curriculum as a whole. It is not the fault of anybody in particular. It is simply an endemic structural fault based on what Young (1998) described as an organisational ethos rather than a curriculum ethos. A timetable based on specific allocations of time for insulated subjects, that is used by a central administration as an accounting instrument relating to the payment of teachers' salaries, is a recipe for an inflexible learning environment that is not conducive to integration.

Young (1998) argued for a connective form of integration that would require an inversion of existing bureaucratic approaches and would put personal and social development in a central position in the curriculum. Young (1998) was at pains to point out that he was not opposed to subjects, but to the manner in which they became insulated from one another in the bureaucratic model. Beginning with a clear curriculum purpose based on the perceived needs of young people in the future created a changed relationship in schools between social and cultural development, the whole curriculum and individual subjects. The subjects would be no longer seen as ends in themselves but as a means of making a significant contribution to the overall curriculum. The criteria for judging subjects in a connective model of integration would not alone be the contribution an individual subject makes to the overall curriculum but also how it related to other subjects in the context of the overall

curriculum. Young (1998) argued that the role of subject specialists in a curriculum based on connective integration needed to be made explicit in four ways;

- by identifying the specialist skills and knowledge they could offer;
- by showing how any of the specific skills and knowledge could contribute to the broader curriculum goals through collaboration with other subjects;
- by identifying the contribution that different subjects could make to raising overall levels of achievement;
- by identifying the contribution of subject specialists in enabling school/community links (Young 1998:96).

Young (1998) accepted that the change from a bureaucratic to a connective approach to integration had major implications for both school principals and teachers. The former would be required to take on a curriculum leadership role. They would be required to encourage and facilitate teachers in different specialisms to collaborate with one another in the context of a team approach towards shared whole school goals. Helping teachers to change from insular to connective subject specialists is a major challenge for school principals. It has to be a gradual process. Young (1998) stressed that it is crucial to involve all the staff in discussing and deciding on the different steps to be taken in proceeding with the change. It is necessary that teachers are reassured on one hand that their subjects are not being abandoned while they are asked not to see them as entities in their own right but as parts of the overall curriculum purpose of the school.

The social and cultural education of young people in an age of increasing globalisation challenges schools to decide whether to address the impact of economic factors overtly or covertly. Young (1998) argued that countries are faced with a stark choice between an education led economy or an economy led education. He stressed

the need to address the moral issues that will arise as a result of changing forms of production and business. He claimed that it would become increasingly difficult to separate economic issues from moral issues in the future.

Young (1998) also stressed the need for young people of the future to address the questions of accepting cultural diversity and of learning to establish mutual trust with other people, who might be culturally different from them. He claimed that not only did an increased understanding of other cultures help people to be better citizens but that it also increased their employability. Brown and Lauder (1997) stated that in the USA businesses were increasingly seeking workers, who had cross-cultural knowledge and inter-cultural communications skills.

Young (1998) accepted that a change to a connective form of integration could not happen overnight in England and Wales as it had major implications for school organisation, pedagogy and qualifications. He suggested that it would be feasible in the short term to develop a transitional model within the context of the National Curriculum. He argued that the connective model was the most appropriate for post-compulsory education in the context of moving towards a learning society based on a whole range of learning relationships. Young (1998) envisioned a learning society comprised of relationships between people in educational institutions of various kinds; between people in educational institutions and people in institutions that do not have a formal educational role; and between people in all walks of life, who have no formal contact with educational institutions. Young (1998) accepted that such a learning society would demand the reconceptualisation of existing institutions and of forms of qualifications, the reprofessionalisation of teachers and the development of a critical theory of learning.

Ingram (1979) warned that while integrative teaching had many positive aspects it also had serious shortcomings. Public examinations generally were not geared to integrated learning with the result that both teachers and parents treated it with a certain amount of suspicion. This resulted in a general perception that integrated learning had a lower status than subject-based learning in the eyes of the public. Ingram (1979) acknowledged that while integrated teaching / learning covered a wide range of knowledge there was a danger that the treatment tended to be superficial. The areas covered tended to be rather haphazard so that there was a need for very careful planning. Some form of curricular frame was desirable (Ingram 1979:82-93).

Bernstein (1975) stressed that a change from collection to integrated codes involved fundamental changes not alone in the framing of knowledge but also in matters of power and control. He was not surprised that such changes would result in deep-felt resistances. He gave a very sobering warning. He suggested that if four specific conditions were not met that there was a danger that the integrated curriculum could generate a very confused situation for both students and teachers. The four conditions were:

- *There must be consensus about the integrating idea and it must be very explicit...*
- *The nature of the linkage between the integrating idea and the knowledge to be co-ordinated must also be coherently spelled out....*
- *A committee system of staff may have to be set up to create a sensitive feed-back system and which will also provide a further agency of socialisation into the code*
- *One of the major difficulties which inhere in integrated codes arises over what is to be assessed, and the form of assessment: also the place of specific competencies in such assessment* (Bernstein 1975 pp.106-108).

Corson (1991b) said that the experience in both primary and secondary schools in

Tasmania confirmed the accuracy of Bernstein' predictions. In schools where all four conditions were being met both teachers and students appeared to have a clear sense of time, place and purpose. In schools where they were not met, the quality of teaching seemed to have suffered from a general sense of vagueness.

4.5.6. Relationship of Cross-curricular Tasks to Critical Thinking

Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curricular tasks were designed as a vehicle for curriculum integration in the context of a modular curriculum. The stated curriculum purpose of Leaving Certificate Applied was the preparation of young people for transition from school to adult and working life, making maximum use of the resources of the local community, with a particular focus on the needs and interests of the young people involved and the needs of the local region (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a).

A number of features of Leaving Certificate Applied are quite conducive to curriculum integration. The modular curriculum was designed so that at all times during the two-year programme approximately eight different modules would be running simultaneously with either two or three cross-curricular tasks (Department of Education / National Council for Curriculum and Assessment1995a). The flexible curriculum framework and the clear curriculum purpose both contribute to an infrastructure supportive of connective integration. The three main elements of the programme, vocational preparation, vocational education and general education/contemporary issues are also supportive in that they provide three different over-arching ideas under which cross-curricular tasks could facilitate relating individual modules to one another and to the social, cultural and economic life of the local community. The ongoing assessment of cross-curricular tasks as part of a national

system of certification had the potential to be a source of formative feedback to both teachers and students. A Support Service was provided to support school principals and teachers in meeting the challenge of a transition from a curriculum comprised of insulated subjects to a more integrated modular curriculum through regular in-career development workshops and visits to schools. Even under such favourable conditions a significant movement towards connective integration presented a great challenge to school principals, teachers, and those with responsibility for providing a summative assessment service.

I formulated the following theoretical assumption based on my review of the literature and my own 20 years experience of attempting to introduce integrated curricula to second level schools in Ireland.

Cross-curricular tasks contribute to the empowerment of young people by improving their disposition to think more critically by:

- enabling them to begin to think critically at whatever level of sophistication they are;
- using reading and writing to develop modes of thought;
- interrogating contemporary issues, local, national and global with particular reference to moral and ethical issues;
- improving their capacity to conceptualise through practising fact-finding, interpretation of findings, reflection, analysis, synthesis in the form of key concepts, report writing and making oral presentations both individually and in collaboration with others;
- integrating what they are learning from different cross-curricular tasks with prior learning by modifying existing ideas or discarding them;
- learning about the contemporary economic environment by experiencing work

practices in the local region and by consciously engaging with work experiences through reflection;

- self-assessment of theoretical and experiential learning by clearly defined criteria;
- increasing the amount of responsibility that they had for their own learning as teachers moved along a continuum from a mainly instructional mode to a more facilitative mode of teaching;
- by encouraging increased team work between teachers of different specialisms.

4.6. Community Consciousness

4.6.1. Empowerment through a Sense of Community

The empowerment of people and communities is one of the great challenges of the 21st century. Covey (2000) commented on the growing feeling of helplessness among individuals and communities as the pace of change in people's lives, driven by economic and technological factors, increases more and more. He argued that change was not the problem but the manner in which individuals and communities allowed themselves to be disempowered by it. He warned that individuals need not feel powerless, provided they conscientiously considered what values they considered to be really important in their own lives and strove to accomplish them both as individuals and communities. He did not suggest that it would be easy for individuals or for communities. He accepted that it would demand mature leadership at all levels of society.

> *This kind of leadership is not just a function of people at the top. It is a function of every person providing leadership at their level, so that they develop a personal mission statement ... and then pay the price* (Covey 2000:71).

Personal effectiveness, based on high self-esteem and a high level of employability, coupled with critical autonomy will not be sufficient to provide the type of leadership required. Hodkinson (1994) warned that personal effectiveness and critical autonomy could combine as a charter for selfishness unless they were informed by a sense of community.

> *This dimension overlaps with communal aspects of personal effectiveness and critical autonomy, but takes them further. As members of a pluralist society, we need to recognize the needs, aspirations and position of other individuals and groups* (Hodkinson 1994:500).

Evans (1993) explained that it was necessary for people to understand "that they belong to an interdependent world of wider caring communities, including their own families, religious, cultural, sporting, social communities, their own home town/village and the communities of their native land, Europe and a wider world" (quoted by Clark 1996:57). Effectiveness as a member of a family requires basic communication skills but it also demands fundamental social qualities such as "attachment and responsibility, constancy and fairness, helpfulness and care" (Schleicher 1982:2) in relating not only to members of one's own household but to members of other households. Hodkinson (1994) argued that young people should be enabled to identify areas where individual sacrifice was required in the interest of the common good. They should also be enabled to identify and criticise inequalities and injustices in society that have particular relevance to their own lives.

The difficulty of facilitating young adolescents, who perceive that they have failed at school or that they have been failed by school, to develop a sense of community should not be underestimated. Clark (1996) warned that community educators were obliged to affirm the human worth of those with whom they were involved. It was necessary to take all aspects of the lives of the people with whom they were working, as seriously as similar aspects of their own lives, if they were to build the required high level of mutual trust. He stressed that affirmation did not consist of sentimental expressions of good-will conveyed in a condescending manner but rather a positive acceptance of the value and human potential of each person or of each mini or macro community. Affirmation skills do not happen automatically. People need to learn them through practising them with a positive attitude.

> *Affirmation of this kind is an art that has to be learnt and practised. It is founded on an empathy with others ... It arises out of a genuine concern for others based*

> *on the communal values of life, liberty and love in pursuit of the common good* (Clark1996:108).

Inclusiveness is an essential element in all forms of community whether that is a family, a school or a voluntary organisation.

> *It means giving everyone a reason to be involved* (Stainback and Stainback (1992).

The extent to which persons participate in the different communities to which they belong depends on the openness of the communities in question and on the level of individuals' collaborative effectiveness.

> *Collaboration is a fundamental aspect of the community development process* (Clark 1996:73).

Poverty greatly undermines a person's sense of community. Poverty is more than simply a lack of adequate income. It is also the sense of exclusion from participating in society.

> *While economic and material deprivation and other material considerations remain a central element in defining poverty, it is increasingly accepted that policy responses to addressing poverty must be formulated in a broader context, which encompass not only the material conditions but also the extent to which a person is able to actively participate in the lives of their communities* (Ireland 1998b:24).

Clancy's (1982, 1988, 1992,1995) studies of access to third level education in Ireland over the past eighteen years have shown that there has been a persistently wide difference between the percentage of the offspring of higher professional parents and those of unskilled or semi-skilled parents, who actually participate. Lynch (1999) explained that while there had been a serious attempt made to equalise access there had

not been a coherent plan to equalise participation rates. Children of low-income families tend to leave the formal school system soon after reaching the age for compulsory attendance.

> *The push to leave is greater than the pull to stay* (Lynch 1999:173).

Clark stressed the need for affirmation to be given to disadvantaged people as part of the community development process.

> *Affirmation must be given to those undervalued by society, the physically weak, the unemployed, the poor and the socially marginalised* (Clark1996:108).

The community dimension of empowerment brings into the question the relationship of power and authority. Clark (1996) argued that authority does not necessarily depend on power. Authority was built on the person's view of her/his own human worth and on the extent to which others affirm that worth. Empowerment depends on the extent that persons strengthen their personal authority so as to take greater responsibility for their own lives and for their commitment to others.

> *Enhancing authority means weaning participants away from self-centredness and over-dependence on others ... in order that they themselves can help facilitate a more dynamic experience of community for those involved in the learning process* (Clark1996:109).

As students become more empowered they naturally expect to have a greater voice in decision making. This demands the development of a culture of consent based on negotiation if destructive alienation is to be avoided. Teachers, who have become accustomed to a routine of didactic teaching, need the support and encouragement of their peers as they develop skills of negotiation. Similar to affirmation skills negotiation skills cannot be learned from a textbook but from personal experiences self-evaluated on the basis of communal values consistent with the common good. Cross-

curricular tasks, in which students are given an increasing amount of control in planning, decision-making and self-assessment, appear to provide an appropriate setting for both teachers and students to develop negotiation skills and affirmation skills experientially.

4.6.2. Place of Community in Schools in Ireland

It is ironic that the label community was used and is used by the Department of Education and the local authority Vocational Education Committees (VECs) in their struggles for control of secondary schools in Ireland since the 1980s. The Department of Education and Science uses the label 'community schools' and the VECs use the label 'community college' (see p.33), while the concept of community was and is largely ignored. The main focus of all second level schools was and is one of individualistic competitiveness based on the level of achievement of individual students in insulated subjects at the Leaving Certificate examination on which entry to Third Level courses is based (Lynch 1989) (Hyland 1999). While there were some limited attempts made to make school facilities available to voluntary groups and employers, there were not any effective structures put in place to develop schools as learning communities or to involve schools actively in community development initiatives.

In Ireland, educational services outside the mainstream schooling system are provided by a wide range of disparate providers such as Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary community organisations. The Green Paper entitled *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* divided the services into two main categories, the Adult Education and Training provision and Community Education (Ireland 1998b). Community education has been happening in Ireland at two levels, one providing a wide range of cultural, artistic and craft activities availed of generally

as leisure pursuits by people, who have satisfactorily completed formal schooling, the other as a form of community development focusing on marginalised people in society. There has been a major expansion in the latter in recent years. Activities have been mainly a combination of local initiatives supported by significant public funding. EU programmes such as Leader (Rural development), URBAN (for Urban areas), NOW (New Opportunities for Women), Horizon (addressing Disability and Disadvantage), Youthstart (Social inclusion of young people), Integra (Educational / Training Innovations for excluded groups) have resulted in significant developments in the last two decades of the 20th century. A major impetus was given to community education by the establishment of area based partnership companies, involving statutory and voluntary agencies, to focus on designated areas of disadvantage both rural and urban. Empowerment was the common aim of all the community education projects, funded by the European Union. They all appear to have been attempting to give different groups of disadvantaged people a greater sense of ownership over their own lives through critical reflection and active involvement in decision making regarding their own communities. There has been a significant growth in education programmes for women that were organised and implemented by women. There is evidence that the most common barriers to participation by women were their own low self-esteem and the fear of learning (Ireland 1998b).

While excellent work is being done in both Adult Education and Training and in Community Education there are major weaknesses in the provision as it exists. The Green Paper entitled *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* spelt out seven major weaknesses:

- *Lack of a core identity;*
- *low levels of articulation and communication between the sector and other*

education and training sectors;

- *high levels of fragmentation leading to the duplication of effort and the failure to share good practice;*
- *low levels of investment and a heavy reliance on EU funding;*
- *inadequate attention to adult needs within the overall education system and poor access and progression opportunities, particularly for those seeking to re-enter the system with literacy and basic education needs;*
- *Ireland comparing poorly with other countries in terms of performance in adult literacy, educational levels of those over 25, and access to continuing education and training;*
- *Rigidities in the system which are ill-suited to adult needs.* (Ireland 1998b:114).

The chances for young people, who leave school after Leaving Certificate Applied, of becoming active participants in any form of a learning society in Ireland are poor in the light of the above weaknesses. In July 2000 the Irish Government proposed to proceed with the establishment of a National Adult Learning Council as an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science (Ireland 2000). The Government also proposed to proceed with the organisation of Local Adult Learning Boards on a broad partnership basis that would facilitate statutory and voluntary providers to work in harmony with one another.

The White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland 2000) confirmed the following key principles for each Local Adult Learning Board as proposed in the Green Paper (Ireland 1998b):

- An action plan should be prepared by each Local Adult Learning Board based on an assessment of existing provision relative to needs;
- Priority should be given to ensure that needs of adults with literacy/numeracy

difficulties were addressed;

- that account is taken of the successes of the community education model in engaging disadvantaged groups and individuals in adult learning;
- there is a focus on capacity building in support of local development needs;
- there are fora for consultation with community groups as part of the development of area action plans;
- feedback from participants is an intrinsic part of ongoing appraisal and review processes.

In the overall co-ordination of services in each region, the Boards will be required to ensure

- *Access – provision of a range of programmes at a variety of levels to meet the needs of different target groups;*
- *Adherence to national quality standards prescribed by the National Qualifications Authority and the National Learning Council, allied with an active staff development strategy and a proactive role in recording and sharing good practice*;
- *Relevance to local needs, particularly those of excluded groups, in the spheres of social inclusion, community development, industry needs and social, cultural and artistic pursuits;*
- *Systematic progression opportunities for participants in liaison with the range of providers in the region, which ensure a ladder of progression from basic education and literacy levels through to third level* (Ireland 1998b:121,122).

Young (1998) identified four possible models of a learning society: the schooling model, the credentialist model, the access model and the educative or connective model.

The Leaving Certificate Applied participants' chances of progressing through the schooling model, that is continuing to participate in formal schooling, is greatly constrained by being limited to a narrow range of Further Education courses due to the policy of 'ringfencing'. Their chances of progressing via the credentialist route are also constrained by the low currency level of Leaving Certificate Applied in the labour market as well as on entry to Third Level. The access model, where learners could individually gain access to learning under their own terms, would appear to be a possible way forward for Leaving Certificate Applied participants particularly due to recent developments in information technology. However, such an approach demands a high level of sophistication in planning and curriculum design and in self-evaluative learning in considerable isolation. It would be difficult to see many Leaving Certificate Applied participants persevering without extensive support at community level from bodies such as the Local Adult Learning Boards proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland 2000). Young's (1998) educative/connective model provides a useful basis for planning such boards.

The educative/connective model would give priority to individuals developing learning relationships throughout their lives in whatever institution, or voluntary organisation they were involved (Young 1998). A reconceptualisation of schools and school subjects so as to integrate school and non-school learning would create an environment that would be supportive of students engaged in initial vocational education, such as participants in Leaving Certificate Applied, adopting a positive attitude to life-long learning. A reconceptualisation of the process of qualification as a continuous process, aimed at raising standards and at developing new skills and understandings, should provide a flexible situation whereby instead of feeling debarred from progressing along a particular career path, recognition would be given to whatever

progress had been made. Increased learning transactions between educational institutions, businesses, voluntary organisations and families would be conducive to all the participants, including participants in initial vocational education, getting a clearer perception of the extent to which learning and production have become intertwined with one another in recent years. Nobody knows the answers to many problems that arise in workplaces to-day. In many cases it is by experiencing problems at first hand, working through them and contributing one's particular expertise to their solution that a person learns to keep abreast of developments in to-day's workplace. That is why Reich (1993) was advocating the need to educate more 'symbolic analysts'.

4.6.3. Building Bridges between School and other social systems

Smith (1987), reporting on a conference in Limerick in 1986 to mark the close of the Irish Pilot Projects in the EC Transition Programme, was critical of relationships between schools and the communities they purported to serve.

> *Relationships between schools and their communities are not as healthy as they might be. The tendency to see 'schooling' and 'education' as one and the same has led to the institutionalisation of the education process and has resulted in an artificial split between school and community, learning and living, education and life... The process must be two-way. Schools, teachers and young people need to be involved in the life of the community and people and agencies in the community need to be involved in the life of the schoo*l (Smith 1987:6).

Smith (1987) stressed that there were barriers both inside and outside schools to the integration of schools with their communities.

> *Schools must carry out their role efficiently and effectively in co-operation and partnership with other agencies in the community. Ways must be found to*

> *overcome the barriers that exist between the different agencies and their partners* (Smith 1987:4).

She claimed that overcoming those barriers was probably the greatest challenge facing schools in Ireland at the end of the 20th century.

One of the underlying principles in the Leaving Certificate Applied Draft Programme Statement was:

> *The Leaving Certificate Applied has a strong community base so as to complement the school as a learning location* (Department of Education/ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:4) .

The Programme Statement also stated that teaching and learning in the Leaving Certificate Applied promoted co-operation between the school and the local community. There were not any guidelines as to how the strong community base was to be built. Smith (1987) had presented A Nine Point Agenda for Action based on the experience of Local Liaison Networks established during the first phase of SPIRAL, an EC Transition pilot project (1978-87) based at Shannon Curriculum Development Centre (see Section 3.4.3.). She warned that new patterns of co-operation take time to develop. She identified the main issues at local level:

- *which agencies , services and institutions can, and need to be brought together in a co-ordinated approach?*
- *what partnerships already exist at local level between agencies dealing with young people?*
- *what type of management structures are necessary to bring together the different partners?*
- *what are the structural, legal or professional barriers to successful co-ordination?*
- *what strategies could be effective in overcoming the barriers that exist?* (Smith

1987:9).

She also stressed the need to help the participating agencies to appreciate each other's priorities, objectives, potential resources and limitations. In relation to barriers to community interaction, Clark (1996) stressed that there can be no sense of community if diversity is ignored and if the inevitable tensions between groups are not recognised as possible sources of creativity.

Smith (1987) suggested that simple manageable non-controversial tasks would be most helpful in building a spirit of co-operation. She warned against over-elaborate management structures. She recommended that arrangements be made to pass information and exchange experience between agencies. There was need for a promoter to keep the process going by sensitising the partners to the continual need for improving co-ordination. She claimed however, that effective co-operation and co-ordination appeared to depend less on structures than on attitudes and motivation (Smith 1987). She stressed the crucial role of the school principal at the interface between schools and the outside world . She said that co-operative initiatives between schools and the community did not happen of their own accord.

> *The pivotal position which the school principal occupies means that it is he or she who must organise, or at least, orchestrate the planning, management and implementation of co-operation and partnership* (Smith 1987:front cover).

However merely orchestrating interactions with other social systems will not transform a school into a learning community unless it is driven by a clear curriculum purpose.

4.6.4. Schools as Learning Communities

The transformation of schools in Ireland from centres dominated by individualistic competitiveness into centres energised by feelings of solidarity, significance and

security would demand enlightened leadership at all levels. Clark (1996) warned that it is not sufficient to tell people that they should be more interdependent.

> *The whole school must experience and live out what it means to be a learning community* (Clark 1996:57).

The transformation of a traditional school to a learning community would require a movement from isolated subjects to greater interconnectivity of subjects resulting in a more holistic learning environment. Empowering students to have a greater voice in decision-making would challenge teachers to develop the skills of affirmation and negotiation necessary for them to collaborate with students in developing a culture of consent within the school. Prawat (1996) warned that teachers would only feel comfortable in that role if they viewed ambiguity and uncertainty as a normal part of the learning process and saw themselves "more like provokers than facilitators" (p.94).

Clark (1996) advocated a community curriculum, which he claimed was an additional code to Bottery's four codes of education. Bottery (1990) based his four codes on practice in schools in England at the end of the 1980s. They were

- cultural transmission code,
- child-centred code,
- social reconstruction code and
- GNP (Gross National Product) code.

Clark (1996) proposed that the community curriculum as proposed by him would be an additional code i.e. the synergistic code. The basic construct of the community curriculum is community. Before engaging with the local community, schools need to look critically at themselves as communities. People do not learn about community by talking about it but by living it.

> *It is thus a matter of supreme importance that schools learn how to promote*

> *community. To do this they have to be communities. Effectively to address this task the medium has to become the message* (Clarke 1996:61).

The communal task is "to create an increasingly strong sense of security, of significance and of solidarity within and across social systems" (Clark 1996:52). The school like all other social systems is made up of different segments, people, environment, interaction and relationships informed by the feelings, values and beliefs of the people involved. The values consistent with a sense of community may be classified under headings of life, liberty and love. Life as value is based on the human right to sustain oneself as a healthy person. Liberty as value is based on the human right to reach one's full potential as a human being through free choice. Love as value is based on the right to relate to others through caring and sharing.

> *Love as value undergirds a sense of solidarity. But it also nurtures life and liberty* (Clark 1996:51.

The communal challenge for the school as a social system is to create increasingly strong feelings of security, significance and solidarity informed by values of life, liberty and love, not only within itself but across the other social systems within its ambit. Different social systems need to be given the leadership that will encourage them to participate in communal activities for other than narrow selfish motives. The task is about building learning communities involving a synthesis of educational and communal activities. The participants are collaborating social systems. The content has two main features.

> *On the one hand it is about those communal skills which enable students to understand and acquire the abilities needed to translate the concept of community from ideal to reality. On the other, it embraces those aspects of the human sciences, which provide knowledge and insights into the nature of society*

and culture, how the latter maintain themselves and how they change (Clark 1996:96).

The beliefs on which the code is based are those that promote the common good. The values based on life, liberty and love reflect communal inclusivity. Clark claimed that the synergistic code was energised by feelings of solidarity, significance and security. Its attitude to culture is one of openness and inclusivity.

The nature of change most conspicuous within this code is transformation ... It is concerned far more with the coming of a new order than with the deliberate destruction of the old (Clark 1996:97).

It is difficult to imagine a school transforming itself to the extent of really embracing a community curriculum unless the principal sensed the need for change. An awareness of a need to change has to be accompanied with a shared vision of what is required (Elliott-Kemp and Elliott-Kemp 1992). The development of a genuine shared vision cannot be imposed from the top, but must be allowed to evolve slowly from on-going inclusive discussions as a common set of values to which a great majority of teachers, students and parents can give their commitment (Clark 1996) (Covey 2000). The shared vision is never finalised, it is being continuously revised in the light of the impact of the experience of implementation on the reactions of the different partners expressed democratically. Sensing the timing of when to be cautiously reflective is as important a characteristic of good leadership as sensing the timing of when to be boldly innovative.

Community development is based on the idea of developing learning relationships between different social systems in a locality such as institutions, businesses, families and voluntary organisations so as to achieve a synthesis of educational and communal activities. The school curriculum, which would have

community development as a primary purpose, would not simply aim at reorganising itself as a learning community but would also act as a focus for the other social systems in the locality that are prepared to collaborate in developing their community. The school has two essential functions in community development. It must reorganise itself as a dynamic learning community, comprised of individuals and groups who are increasingly becoming personally committed to the concept of lifelong learning. A school must also provide the leadership that will inspire and motivate other social systems in the locality to interact directly with young people as part of reorganising themselves as learning communities. Interaction with other social systems in a locality challenges schools to face up to the communal dilemma of "how social systems can become more open to one another without weakening their own sense of community or destroying that of others" (Clark1996:48).

Recognition by schools that worthwhile learning takes place in a variety of non-school locations is essential to the development of a pluralist community based on values that promote the common good in a spirit of openness and inclusivity. If schools are to take a leadership role in a learning society based on a network of learning relationships there are major implications for teacher education and for agencies involved in assessment and certification procedures.

Young (1998) argued that the teacher education curriculum in England and Wales would need to be revised with regard to four issues. It would be necessary to reconceptualise teachers' learning with reference to its form, its content, its ongoing nature and its location. The organisation of knowledge in the teacher education curriculum would need to develop a new relationship between the different educational disciplines and between educational disciplines and the day-to-day problems facing teachers. New forms of relationships between schools and universities would need to be

developed. Procedures regarding the accreditation of teachers would need to be reviewed.

There are two separate approaches to teacher education in Ireland, one for primary teachers and one for second-level teachers. A review of teacher education for second level teachers is currently (November 2000), in progress, but there are not any indications of any changes such as those proposed by Young (1998) being introduced. Progress towards possible developments in assessment and certification in Ireland is not possible due to the impasse between the Department of Education and the teacher unions.

4.6.5. Indicators of a Sense of Community

Major innovations in curricula, teacher education and assessment and certification procedures are required before Ireland would provide an environment conducive to the educative/connective model of a learning society envisioned by Young (1998). Leaving Certificate Applied is one initiative whereby the policy makers aspired to develop learning locations in the local community to complement the work of the school (Department of Education / National Council for Curriculum and Assessment1995a). The principal curricular instrument they chose to link learning in the out-of-school locations with that of the school was the cross-curricular task.

My experience of local liaison activities involving second level schools and other social systems within their catchment areas over the past twenty years, informed by a review of the literature, suggests the following theoretical assumption regarding the possible contributions that cross-curricular tasks could make to empowering a young person by giving her/him an increased sense of community.

Cross-curricular tasks contribute to giving young people an increased feeling of:

- security through

  affirming their human worth, particularly their physical and material well-being;

- significance through

  actively including her/him in school activities;

  giving them more scope in decision-making, planning and self-assessment;

  increasing their level of awareness of the potential contribution they could make to their own family and neighbourhood through learning relationships;

  investigating a variety of social issues at local/national/global level;

- solidarity through

  encouraging collaboration between students and teachers and between teachers and teachers;

  enabling teachers to develop negotiation skills and affirmation skills experientially;

  facilitating schools in developing learning relationships with families, institutions, employers and voluntary organisations.

4.7. Summary

Cross-curricular tasks appear to have the capacity to make a significant contribution to the empowerment of young people. At the beginning of the 21st century the personal effectiveness of young people depends very much on their self-esteem and their employability. Cross-curricular tasks have the potential to promote students' self-esteem to the extent that they contribute to students' self-discipline and social skills, their teachers' sensitivity and the resulting increase in mutual respect of both for each

other. The self-confidence and self-assuredness based on increased self-esteem is a good foundation on which a young person can build her/his future employability. Cross-curricular tasks have the potential to contribute to a young person's employability by giving them an opportunity to practise a variety of communication and self-organisational skills in different contexts, and to form a vision of the future by analysing different occupations in relation to their own perceived abilities and interests and their observations of current work practices. Increased self-esteem and employability are dependent on a person's ability to think critically for her/himself. Cross-curricular tasks contribute to critical thinking to the extent that they provide an opportunity for young people to learn and apply skills that are conducive to conceptualisation and integration. Empowerment requires that one's ability to think about oneself and one's employability is complemented by a sense of one's family, and one's community both local and global. Cross-curricular tasks could contribute to a sense of community in so far as they enable young people to interrogate critically contemporary issues both local and global and form learning relationships with adults in the local community in doing so. It is important that administrators and teachers take cognisance of key problems that arise in relation to cross-curricular tasks. The magnitude of change involved for teachers, who have become routinised in didactic teaching methods, needs to be appreciated. The tensions between cross-curricular learning and subject-based learning, even when that happens in modular form, provides a major challenge to the leadership of school principals and programme co-ordinators. There is also a need for consistent guidelines for both students and teachers as to what is acceptable behaviour and language in cross-curricular work. Finally there is a need to keep all involved fully informed of efforts that are being made to develop credible criteria for both the formative and summative assessment of cross-curricular tasks.

CHAPTER 5

CONDITIONS INFLUENCING IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TASKS

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine eight linked action/interaction sequences that occurred in the course of the implementation of Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curricular tasks. I consider the way in which the consequences of the different action/interaction sequences were influenced by three types of conditions, causal, intervening and contextual. Causal conditions related to the manner in which cross-curricular tasks were incorporated as an integral part of Leaving Certificate Applied. I examine the following intervening conditions that appeared to have either facilitated or constrained the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in all three case study schools: students' previous experiences of school, economic status of students, student perceptions of equality, gender balance in co-educational schools, the culture of second-level schools, the specialised role of teachers, uncertainty about future of Leaving Certificate Applied, public perceptions of initial vocational education and the number of tasks that students were required to complete. Contextual conditions relating to the implementation of cross-curricular tasks differed significantly from school to school. In this chapter I compare and contrast the manner in which the following contextual conditions influenced the consequences of cross-curricular tasks in the different schools: ethos of school, leadership styles of principals and course co-ordinators, student/teacher

relationships, scale of change for teachers, management skills of teachers, teacher expertise in inquiry based and experience based learning, teacher attitudes to collaborative learning, teacher attitudes to assessment and the quality of school links with other social systems.

5.2. Action/Interaction Sequences

The implementation of cross-curricular tasks in LCA involved students and teachers in eight linked action/interaction sequences relating to

overall management of tasks;

inquiry based tasks;

experience based tasks;

applying communication skills;

applying self-organisational skills;

applying collaborative skills;

facilitating integration;

assessment procedures.

The consequences of the eight linked sequences in relation to the empowerment of the participants differed in accordance with the different ways they were influenced by different types of conditions, causal, intervening and contextual, impacting on them. Causal conditions are defined as "the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:100). Intervening conditions are defined as "the broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interactional strategies" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:103). Intervening conditions differ from causal conditions in that they are not the cause of the phenomenon but rather affect in a general way the manner in which various strategies are being implemented. Contextual conditions are defined as "the particular set of conditions within which the

action/interaction strategies are taken to manage, handle, carry out and respond to a specific phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:101). Contextual conditions differ from intervening conditions in that they relate to a specific set of conditions existing in a specific location at a particular point in time. The scale of differences between the contextual conditions was a major determinant of the differing extents to which the consequences of cross-curricular tasks occurred in the three case study schools.

5.3. Causal Conditions

The causal conditions, relating to empowerment through participation in cross-curricular tasks, were similar for young people in all the participating schools. The Department of Education introduced Leaving Certificate Applied to meet the needs of students who had been opting for either the two-year Senior Certificate course or the one-year VPT (Vocational Preparation and Training) course instead of the traditional Leaving Certificate. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) had been instructed by the Minister in 1993 to design and develop a separate and distinct form of Leaving Certificate "to prepare students for the transition from school to adult and working life, including further education" (Ireland 1995:52). NCCA commissioned a design team to do the developmental work and to report to a steering committee representative of the social partners under the chairmanship of a successful supermarket tycoon. The design team developed a modular curriculum of three main elements, vocational preparation, vocational specialisms and general education in accordance with EU criteria for funding initial vocational education under the European Social Fund (ESF). In order to counter the dangers of fragmentation in a modular curriculum the design team introduced cross-curricular tasks, to be assessed at half-yearly intervals as part of a system of national certification. One of the stated principles on which Leaving Certificate Applied assessment and certification procedures were based was to ensure "the centrality of the Student Tasks to the nature of the Leaving Certificate Applied" (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a:8) The Guidelines, jointly produced by the Department of Education and NCCA and distributed to teachers at in-career development workshops in September 1995, stated that one of the goals of cross-

curricular tasks in Leaving Certificate Applied was "to develop student responsibility and initiative as well as skills in self-evaluation, problem-solving and management" (Department of Education/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995b: Section 2).

5.4. Intervening Conditions

5.4.1. Main Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions refer to a general set of circumstances common to all schools in Ireland that either facilitated or constrained specific action / interaction strategies. The main intervening conditions influencing the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in the case study schools were students' previous experience of school, the economic status of the students, students' perceptions of equality, the culture of second level schools in Ireland, the suspicion of a lack of commitment by the Department of Education to initial vocational education, public perceptions of initial vocational and the number of tasks to be completed and assessed.

5.4.2. Students' previous experience of school

Students either opted to join Leaving Certificate Applied or were directed to do so by the principal of their school. The two most common reasons that students gave for being glad to have joined Leaving Certificate Applied were that they hoped to get a job at the end of the course and that they could avoid the pressure associated with the traditional Leaving Certificate examination.

While the students in all the case study schools had indifferent results in the national Junior Certificate examination and generally had below average literacy levels, they showed a great disparity of levels of self-esteem and intellectual capacity. All the students had completed a three-year course culminating in the Junior Certificate Examination before entering Leaving Certificate Applied. The programme for students leading to the award of the Junior Certificate must include recognised courses in the following subjects: Irish, English, Mathematics, History/Geography or Environmental

and Social Studies, Science or a technological subject and not less than one other subject from the approved list (NCCA 1993:32). Irish, English and Mathematics were examined at Junior Certificate at three levels, Higher, Ordinary and Foundation. The other subjects were examined at two levels, Higher and Ordinary. The available Junior Certificate results of 21 of the students, who were interviewed as part of the research, showed that none of them had taken higher level papers in Mathematics or Irish, and two had taken the higher level papers in English. On the other hand 16 out of 21 had taken Foundation Level in Mathematics and 10 out of 21 had taken Foundation level papers in English and Irish (see Table 3).

Table 3: **Courses taken by 21 interviewees at Junior Certificate examination showing the number of grades attained.**

Subject	Foundation	Ordinary	Higher
Irish	10 (1A,3B,4C,2D)	6 (1A,3B,1C,1D)	0.
English	10 (9C, 1D)	9 (2A,4B,3C)	2 (1D,1E)
Maths	16(1A,3B,10C,2D)	5 (1A,2C,2D)	0.

In October 1996, I administered a range of standardised tests to the students who were present on the days of my visits to the case study schools. The purpose of the tests was to clarify the levels of diversity within the groups and to assist in selecting a sample of students for interview that reflected the levels of diversity. The tests consisted of Raven Standard Progressive Matrices (Raven 1960), Atwell and Wells (1937) Wide Range Vocabulary Test, SCAL (Self-Concept as a Learner Scale) (Waetjen, 1963), and Coopersmith (1981) Self-esteem Inventory (shortened version). The students who participated in the tests ranged in age from 16 years and 2 months to 19 years and 2

months in October 1996.

The Standard Progressive Matrices test a person's ability to develop a systematic method of reasoning through examining a series of meaningless figures and seeing the connections between them. The test consists of five sets of twelve problems. Each set is arranged to begin with easy problems followed by ones that become progressively more difficult. I decided to use Raven's five-point grading system for people aged 20 in distinguishing between the students' different levels of intellectual capacity.

The maximum score for Standard Progressive Matrices is 60. A score at or above the 95th percentile, that is a raw score between 55 and 60, was given Grade I which Raven described as intellectually superior. Raw scores at or above the 75th percentile, that is scores between 49 and 53 were given Grade II, which Raven described as definitely above average in intellectual capacity. A raw score of 54 was given Grade II+. Scores lying between the 25th and the 75th percentile, that is scores between 37 and 48, were given Grade III, which Raven described as intellectually average. Scores over the 50th percentile, that is scores between 44 and 48 were given Grade III+ and scores between 37 and 43 were given Grade III-. Scores less than the 25th percentile (raw score of less than 37) were given Grade IV, which Raven described as definitely below average in intellectual capacity. Scores lying at or below the 10th percentile (raw score of 28) were given Grade IV-. Scores lying at or below the 5th percentile (raw score of 23) were given Grade V, which Raven (1960) described as "intellectually defective".

On the basis of the raw scores I have graded 68 Leaving Certificate Applied students from the three case-study schools, who were present on the day of the test, in the following manner.

Grade II+ (Very definitely above average intellectual capacity)...2 students;

Grade II (Definitely above average intellectual capacity)... ... ...7 students;

Grade III+ (Average intellectual capacity)... ... ...29 students;

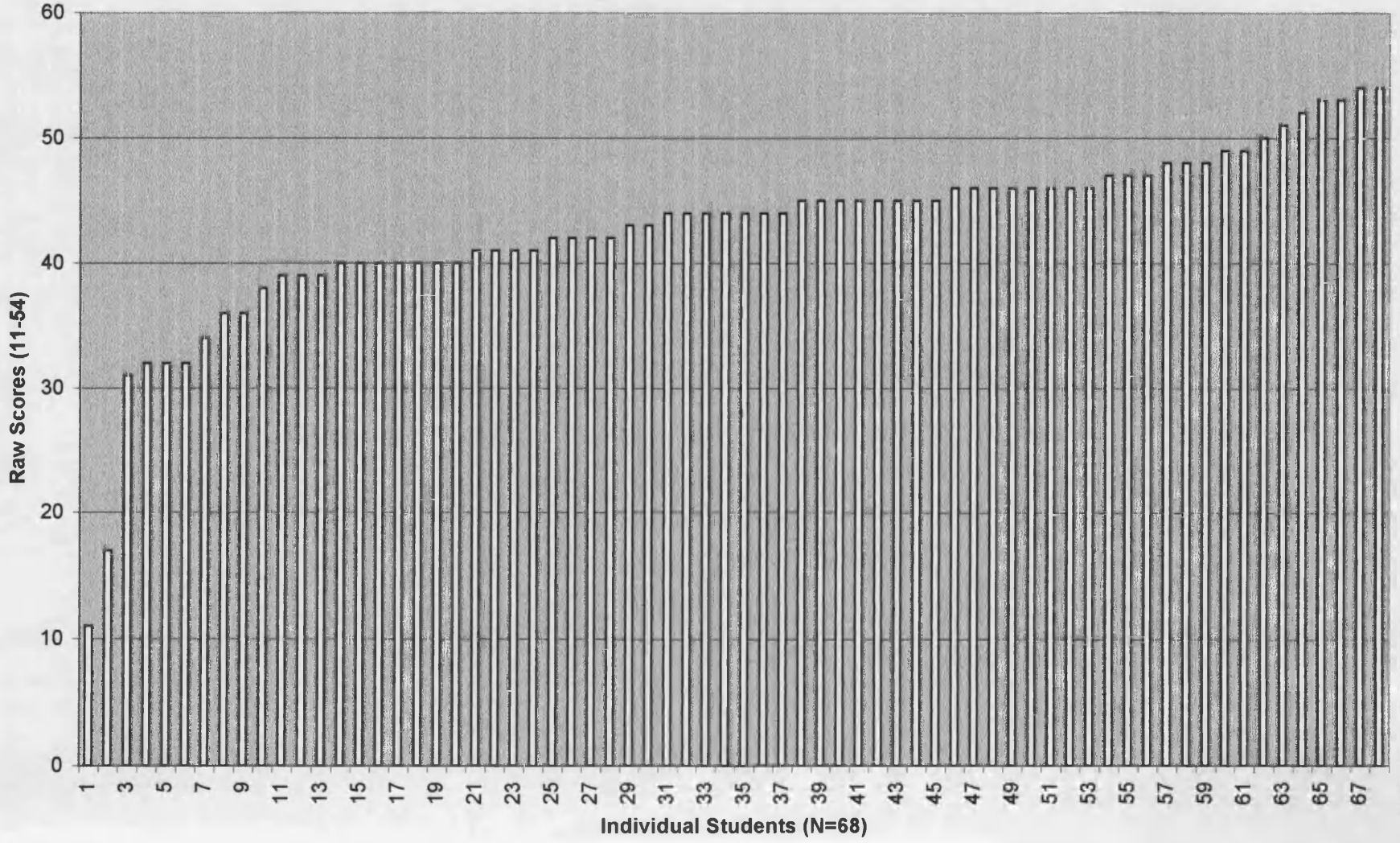
Grade III- (Average intellectual capacity) ... ... 21 students;

Grade IV (Definitely below average intellectual capacity) ... ... 7 students;

Grade V (intellectually challenged)... ... ...2 students.

Figure 1 shows the raw scores in ascending order of the 68 Leaving Certificate Applied students in Raven (1960) Standard Progressive Matrices administered in October 1996.

Figure 1: Raw Scores in Raven Standard Progressive Matrices



In October 1996 participants also took Atwell and Wells (1937) Wide Range Vocabulary test. An experienced psychologist, who worked in an advisory capacity with one of the major school management organisations in Ireland, recommended the test to me. The form of Atwell and Wells Wide Range Vocabulary Test used was the B version (1937) in which the items are arranged in order of difficulty. Respondents were requested to complete sentences by selecting one of five given words. Omissions were regarded as errors. The underlining of two words in relation to the one sentence was also regarded as an error, even if one of the words underlined was correct. The designers developed a set of age norms for the test. They explained that the norms were the median scores of groups of average age for each school grade in Maryland, USA. They warned that beyond age 13 the population on whom the norms were based was highly selective and that consequently the average adult score could be expected to be lower. Figure 2 shows the raw scores in Atwell and Wells (1937) Wide Range Vocabulary Test (n =68) in ascending order of Leaving Certificate Applied students in case study schools. 50 of the 68 participants (74%) had an age norm of 13 or less. 26 (38%) had age norms of 11 or less. Only one student had an age norm of 17. The average chronological age of participants was 17 years and 4 months.

Figure 2: Raw Scores in Atwell & Wells Wide Range Vocabulary Test

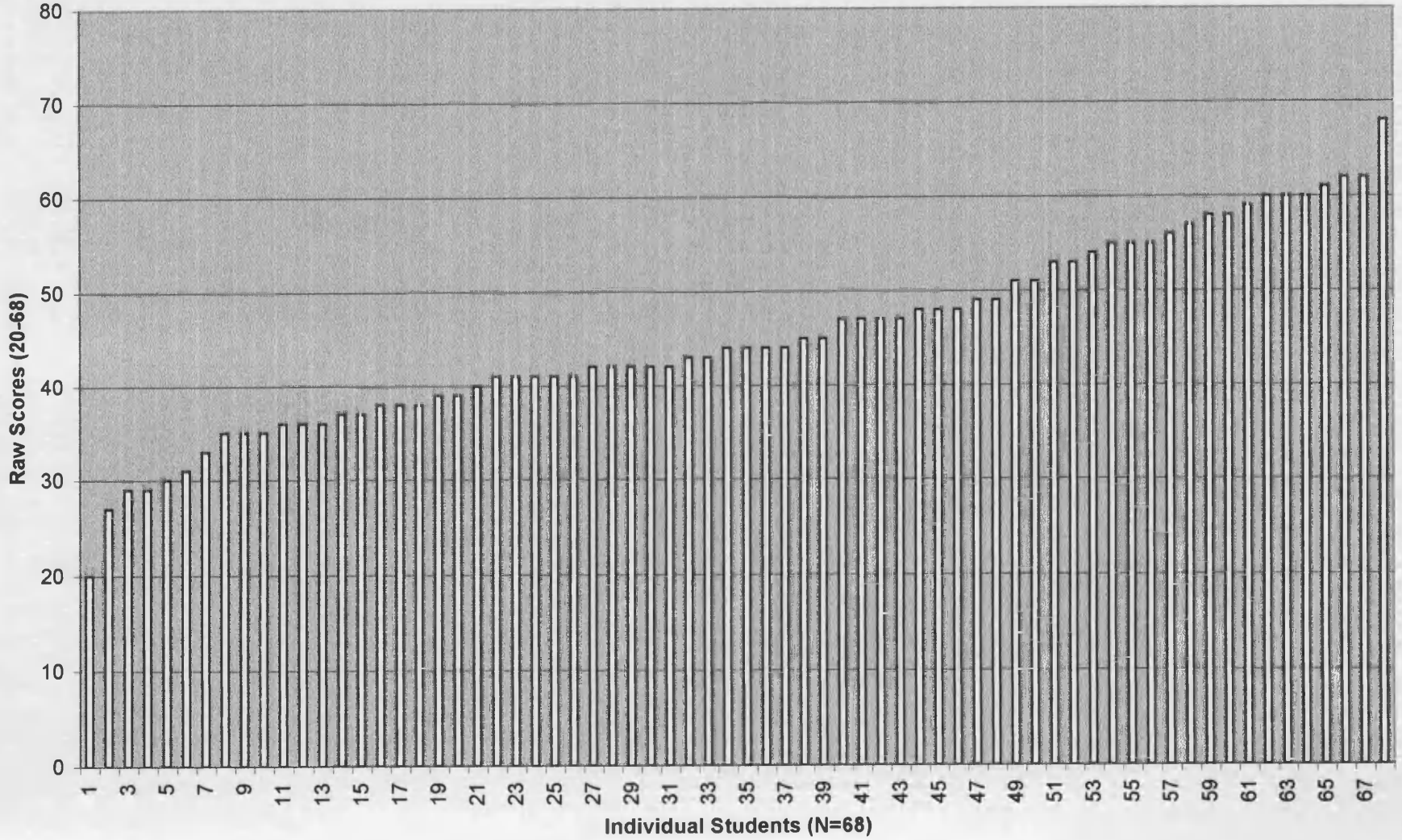


Table 4: **Age norms of 68 Leaving Certificate Applied students as per Atwell and Wells(1937) Wide Range Vocabulary Test.**

Age norm	Number of students
8	2
9	3
10	5
11	16
12	13
13	11
14	8
15	9
16	0
17	1
Total	68

The short-form Coopersmith (1981) Self-esteem Inventory is made up of 25 items. Respondents were requested to categorise the items in one of two columns headed Like Me, Unlike Me. The inventory was scored on the basis of responses to specific items. The designer of the inventory had identified responses that indicated high esteem. The maximum score was 25. The inventory appears to have a bias in favour of males. Francis (1998) reported that when 807 sixteen year olds, attending

state-maintained schools in England, completed the short form of the Coopersmith Inventory the males had recorded a significantly higher score of self-esteem than the females.

There was a difference between the average scores of the three schools on Coopersmith (1981) Self-esteem Inventory. Inner-city Girls, the all-girls school had the lowest average score at 12.4 (See Table 5). A male student from Rural Coed had the highest score at 23/25.

Table 5: **Comparison of scores per school in Coopersmith(1981) Self-Esteem Inventory (Maximum Score=25).**

School	Range	Average
Inner-city Girls (all girls)	4-22	12.4
Market Town Coed (co-educational). Large majority of boys.	6-22	14.25
Rural Coed (co-educational). Large majority of boys.	7-23	15.4

SCAL, the self-concept as a learner test, was developed by Walter Waetjen at the Bureau of Educational Research and Field Services, University of Maryland, USA in 1963. The test was originally designed for eighth graders, but the documentation states that it has been used successfully from the fifth grade through high school. It consists of a list of fifty items that the student is invited to use to describe herself/himself to herself/himself. There are five possible responses to each item ranging from Completely True, numbered 5 to Completely False, numbered 1. The student is required to place what s/he considers to be the most appropriate number after each item. The test is made up of four components that are considered to be dimensions of one's self- concept as a learner i.e. motivation, task orientation, problem solving and

class membership. Positive and negative statements are identified on the basis of how a competent learner would be expected to respond.

There is a maximum and minimum score for each component.

Table 6: **SCAL (Self-concept as a Learner Scale)(Waetjen1963) scoring system.**

Motivation	Maximum 65	Minimum 12
Task Orientation	Maximum 65	Minimum 13
Problem Solving	Maximum 65	Minimum 12
Class Membership	Maximum 55	Minimum 11

There was a wide range of scores in each component of SCAL test.

Table 7: **Range of scores of Leaving Certificate Applied students in SCAL (Self-concept as a Learner Scale) (Waetjen 1963).**

SCAL Component	RANGE OF SCORES
Motivation	28/65 - 54/65
Task Orientation	28/65 - 60/65
Problem Solving	32/65 - 55/65
Class Membership	28/55 - 55/55 -

The tests confirm the diversity of Leaving Certificate Applied students in the case study schools. There appears to have been a wide range of intellectual capacity in each school group. There was a general deficit in relation to range of vocabulary. 74% with age norms of 13 or less in range of written vocabulary is a clear indication of low levels

of literacy. There were wide variations in the levels of self-esteem, ranging from as low as 4/25 to as high as 23/25. The SCAL tests showed that the students' self-concepts of themselves as learners also varied considerably.

Students' previous experiences of school tended to make them reluctant to be proactive in their approach to managing tasks initially. They were inclined to wait for the teacher to tell them what to do. The low level of literacy skills of some students was a major constraint on action/interaction strategies such as inquiry based learning and applying communication skills. Students' negative experiences of the pressures of terminal written examinations in the form of Junior Certificate was one of the reasons they welcomed ongoing assessment of cross-curricular tasks at regular intervals. The great majority of students found their interviews with external examiners to be affirming and reassuring.

A major constraint was some students' lack of specialist skills required to carry out particular practical tasks. The teacher with responsibility for Construction/Manufacturing explained:

> *There is a big problem about the specialist skills in that they are trying to do some tasks before they have mastered sufficient skills. They were doing timber technology and the task as such I think should be based on having the course completed but they had to start the task quite close to the beginning of the session and it is impossible to get a task for them that would be based on coursework because they had very little coursework done. I find it difficult to get over that ... the work had to be done in a classroom situation. It's a matter of timing.*

The problem was particularly acute for students who had not followed a particular subject that a school had selected as an optional specialism for Leaving

Certificate Applied.

5.4.3. Economic Status of Students

There was evidence that many students in the three case study schools were seriously disadvantaged economically. The principal of Inner-city Girls had reported to the Department of Education in 1995 that 53% of students were deemed to be from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In October 1995 the total number of recognised students was 708 (Ireland 1996). The principal estimated that 237 were from families mainly dependent on social welfare payments; 41 more were from families with low incomes and 95 were from families that were experiencing temporary financial hardship because of particular circumstances. 25% of students came from single parent families. Irregular attendance was a major problem ranging as low as fifty per cent (50%) on Fridays. Inner-city Girls is located in the centre of a provincial city that has the highest level of social housing in the Republic of Ireland. Nolan et al. (1998) claimed that housing tenure was a better predictor of poverty risk in Ireland than location.

> *In urban areas ... the odds of local authority renters being poor remains more than six times that for owner occupiers, suggesting a relationship between poverty and local authority renting in urban areas* (Nolan, Whelan, and Williams 1998:xix).

In the school year 1995/96 the student population of Market Town Coed was 353 i.e. 147 female and 216 male. Seventy five per cent (75%) of students' family incomes are based on social welfare payments in the opinion of the school principal. Thirty per cent (30%) of families are single parent families. Approximately forty five per cent (45%) of entrants to school in First Year complete the full Senior Cycle. There

is a high level of dependence by the families on charitable organisations. In the opinion of the principal a significant proportion of the students are at risk of involvement in criminal activity, drugs and substance abuse. While Market Town Coed is located in a location that has not a particular concentration of poverty, the principal said that a high proportion of Leaving Certificate Applied lived in houses rented from the local public authority. Nolan et al. (1998) claimed that the risk of poverty for local authority tenants had increased significantly between 1987 and 1994.

Rural Coed is a co-educational community school located in a rural area. The nearest village is approximately three miles away. The catchment area is a roughly circular area with a diameter of approximately 25 miles. The largest centre of population in the catchment area has a population of approximately 1300. In Ireland the highest risk of poverty was observed for villages and towns with populations of less than 3000 (Nolan, Whelan, and Williams 1998:xviii). Rural Coed had a student population of 606 (287 female and 319 male) in 1996/97. The majority of the students are the children of small farmers. The school is allocated two teachers above quota as it is deemed to be located in a disadvantaged area. The area has suffered seriously from emigration over a long number of years. The principal explained that many people from the area, who were resident in USA or UK kept the land after their parents died and had leased it to businesses that were engaged in forestry. He estimated that approximately 80% of the parents of the students were in receipt of some form of assistance from the state.

The economic status of students appeared to impinge particularly on experience based learning and inquiry based learning. Many students were forced by economic circumstances to take part-time jobs after school and at weekends. Teachers did not encourage students to use experiences of paid work as a basis for experience based

learning but concentrated on work experience placements organised by the school. In inquiry based learning students appeared to have been intimidated by a social environment different to the one to which they were accustomed.

5.4.4. Student Perceptions of Equality

Current research indicates that in Ireland "there is a groundswell of opinion among students in second-level schools in favour of the democratisation of school structures" (Lynch 1999:249). As part of a research project a deliberate sample of students of all ages and ability groupings was selected from 12 schools located in six different counties to write essays on the following questions.

> *We would like you to write here about any time or place when you felt you've been unfairly or unequally treated since you came to this school, either by other pupils or by teachers.*
>
> *To make school a fairer and more equal place, what kind of changes would you like to see in it?* (Lynch 1999:219).

1202 essays (response rate of 77%) were returned. The principal complaint by the young people (48%) was in relation to what was perceived as unfair or unequal treatment by their teachers. They attributed the unfairness to the manner in which power was exercised in schools and the lack of respect shown by adults for young people. Many students felt that schools had failed to keep pace with the democratisation that was taking place in families and other institutions in which there has been a marked increase in the consultation process. The second major cause of unhappiness (25%) was in relation to grouping and labelling. Most of the complaints came from young people in the lower ability groupings who showed a particular

awareness of the inequalities in opportunity deriving from being grouped and labelled in a particular way.

The sensitivity of students generally and the low levels of self-esteem influenced the reluctance of some to take responsibility for managing their tasks. Initially many students also had great difficulty communicating with adults and were reluctant to formulate and express opinions in public. Strategies relating to developing self-organisational skills and to facilitating curriculum integration were influenced to the extent that students felt they were being treated fairly and in an adult manner by their teachers.

5.4.5. Gender Imbalance in Co-educational Schools

In aggregate performance girls consistently do better than boys in public examinations in Ireland (Drudy & Lynch 1993). The results of the Junior Certificate examination in 1994, that is the year before Leaving Certificate Applied was introduced, show the differences at all three levels Higher, Ordinary and Foundation. In that year, 41.68% of females compared to 35.67% of males were awarded an A or B grade at Higher level. 35.34% of females compared to 27.63% of males were awarded an A or B grade at Ordinary level. 44.76% of females compared to 38.09% of males were awarded an A or B grade at Foundation level. On the other hand a higher proportion of males than females were awarded lower grades. 5.85% of boys compared to 3.38% of girls were awarded E, F or No Grade at Higher level. 10.76% of boys compared to 6.55% of girls were awarded E, F or No Grade at Ordinary level. 7.51% of boys compared to 6.23% of girls were awarded E, F or No Grade at Foundation level (Kellaghan and Dwan 1995:15). The poorer performance of boys at Junior Certificate results in a tendency for boys to outnumber girls in Leaving Certificate Applied class groups in co-educational

schools.

The problem of gender imbalance is highlighted in the context of Leaving Certificate Applied when decisions are being made regarding the choice of two vocational specialisms from among eight possible options in a class group where there is a large male majority. Generally the students wish to continue with a specialism in which they have already achieved a certain level of expertise at Junior Cycle. It often results in individuals being forced to take up a specialism in which they have had no previous experience and in which they have not any particular interest. Such a situation can have a very adverse effect on a student's morale.

In both co-educational schools in the case study girls were in a significant minority in each of the Leaving Certificate Applied classgroups. In Market Town Coed there were five girls in a class of thirty in October 1996. Two of them attended very irregularly. I discussed the gender imbalance in the class with two of the girls, Angela and Flo. Angela did not see any difficulty.

Ó Donnabháin: *What is it like to be one of the five girls in a class full of boys?*

Angela: *You get on with the boys...if you wanted help they'd give you help and you get on good with them socially...have a laugh with them if you want to*

Ó Donnabháin: *So you don't see any problem in having more boys than girls in the class?*

Angela: *No.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Do you prefer to be going to a school where there are boys and girls together?*

Angela: *I like the mix.*

Flo reacted differently.

Ó Donnabháin: *You are one of five girls in a class of thirty. How do you find*

that?

Flo: *Interesting. We get along well, the whole lot of us and they treat me as one of the lads.*

Flo indicated that life could be very unpleasant for some girls at times. There appeared to be incidents of verbal and physical harassment from time to time.

Ó Donnabháin: *So the women don't get a raw deal do they?*

Flo: *Some do... depends very much the mood the lads are in.... they slag us and give out to us and hit us and stuff...*

Ó Donnabháin: *Would you prefer to have more girls in the class?*

Flo: *I would.*

Three of the 25 Leaving Certificate Applied students at Rural Coed in 1995-97 were female. One of the three females was absent from school for a prolonged period due to a serious road accident. The second girl would not come to school without having her friend with her for moral support. The result was that Nora was effectively the only girl in the class for the greater part of the second year of the course.

Ó Donnabháin: *So there are two of you... twenty-two fellows and the two of you?*

Nora: *Oh but they are grand. They are very easy to get on with...*

Ó Donnabháin: *Would you be happier if half of the class were girls?*

Nora: *It would make no difference to me because I have four brothers and I'm used to lads mostly. They don't bother me at all.*

Nora did not appear to be in the least bit intimidated by the boys. On the other hand I was informed by the deputy principal in May 1997 that the four girls, who were in the 1996-98 Leaving Certificate Applied class, had asked if they could leave the class because it was geared entirely to the boys' interests.

5.4.6. Culture of Second-level Schools

The culture of second-level schools in Ireland was not conducive to cross-curricular learning. The 1991 report of the OECD examiners envisaged a major long-term reform of Ireland's education system. It referred to the need to modernise the schools to be more attuned to the cultural/socio-economic condition of modern Ireland. It claimed that social change had produced " a generation of students for whom traditional forms of education were quite unsuited" (OECD 1991:75). The examiners referred to "the need for the transformation of classrooms from traditional centres of instruction to active centres of learning where initiative, independence of thought, practical skills, problem-solving and cognitive strategies become central rather than marginal as they often are at present*" (ibid)*. They argued for a greater involvement by the social partners "whereby the current preoccupation with book and verbal knowledge accompanied by instructional modes of teaching and regurgitative practices in assessment and examinations could be reduced" (*ibid.*). They also expressed the need for more emphasis on cross-curriculum work "which in the normal course of events have to fight hard for recognition in schools"(*ibid.*).

Lynch (1988) claimed that the most prominent features of second-level schooling in Ireland were its increasingly technical orientation and its competitive individualism. While competitive individualism was a feature of schooling in many other countries, it was incompatible in certain ways with Catholic educational ideals espoused by the majority of second level schools in Ireland. Lynch's (1988) claim was substantiated by the manager of the planning division of the Irish Industrial

Development Authority (Lillis 1998), who said that the single most important competitive advantage which Ireland offered for the attraction of inward investment was the education level, skills and attitude of the Irish workforce. He claimed that the annual IDA surveys of multinational corporations located in Ireland repeatedly emphasised their satisfaction with the educational levels of the Irish workforce. He boasted that the World Competitiveness Report of 1998 which compared 46 of the more developed countries on a wide range of competitiveness factors had "ranked Ireland as number one in terms of its educational system meeting the needs of a competitive economy" (Lillis 1998:7). Since multinational corporations are the driving force behind the current economic boom in Ireland statements such as that quoted above are powerful arguments for maintaining the status quo in second level schools.

The culture of second level schools in Ireland was an important intervening condition on all the action/interaction strategies relating to cross-curricular tasks in that work of that nature was peripheral to curricula to varying degrees. The scale of change involved in implementing cross-curricular work varied from school to school and as a result it was one of the main contextual conditions affecting the consequences of Leaving Certificate Applied tasks.

The timetable is a major source of inflexibility in second level schools in Ireland for two reasons. It reflects a curriculum comprised of clearly bounded separated subjects, which are competing with one another for more time in an increasingly competitive environment. Traditionally teaching has been an isolation occupation with teachers totally in control within the confines of their own classrooms. Many jealously guard against any intrusion on their space or on their time. The Department of Education and Science also uses the timetable as the mechanism on which teachers salaries are paid. If the school timetable does not show that a teacher has a certain

number of 'student-contact' hours every week s/he will not be paid. The person designing the timetable is caught between conflicting demands from teachers. As specialists they demand the maximum possible amount of time for their particular subjects. As trade unionists they demand that their working conditions do not deteriorate by being asked to provide more than the agreed number of student contact hours. As there is not any official recognition of time spent by teachers on work other than student contact hours, it is not possible to include formally on the timetable time for teachers to meet. A direct result of the inflexibility engendered by the timetable is a lack of awareness of the importance of teamwork in teaching. An exercise, which I carried out in collaboration with my colleagues on Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service in Spring 1996 confirmed this. At a series of 18 workshops around Ireland teachers were asked to rank the stated goals of the Leaving Certificate Applied Student Task in order of importance. In all cases they placed the goal – *encourage and facilitate teamwork on the part of the teaching team* – last in the order of importance.

5.4.7. Specialised Role of Teachers

Teachers in second level schools in Ireland specialise in specific subjects. The main criterion on which their work is judged is the result of the annual public examinations, Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. Department of Education inspectors inspect very few teachers in any one year. Figures, obtained by The Irish Times under the Freedom of Information Act, show that, in the year 2000 only 604 out of a teaching force of more than 21000 teachers (3%) had been inspected. In 1999 the number of second level teachers inspected was 664. Before 1998 the number of second level teachers inspected annually was much lower. In the school year 1996/1997 when the data for the case studies were being gathered only 142 teachers out of a teaching force

of almost 21000 were inspected (Irish Times 1,2, January 2001:Home News p.7). Most teachers have little prospect of facing an annual inspection, since there is no other school inspection agency in the country. The result has been that teachers tend to concentrate on preparation for examinations in their own particular subject area and to leave basic literacy and numeracy skills to colleagues who specialise in English and Mathematics. There appeared to be reluctance on the part of many teachers to become involved in strategies relating to the application of communication skills in implementing cross-curricular tasks.

5.4.8. Uncertainty regarding Leaving Certificate Applied

A major cause of confusion of teachers was the uncertainty about the date of the launch of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme by the Department of Education and the haste with which it was finally launched. The Leaving Certificate Applied steering committee had been deadlocked during the school year 1994-95 regarding the question of teacher-based assessment. In Spring 1995 the Department of Education issued an invitation to schools to apply for authorisation to introduce Leaving Certificate Applied in September 1995 even though the question of assessment of tasks had not been resolved. In May 1995 the Department of Education invited the principals of interested schools to attend briefing meetings at which they were informed that a Support Service, to provide intensive in-career development courses and any other relevant form of support required, would be provided jointly by Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee Curriculum Development Unit. Each school was invited to send three people, preferably the principal, the co-ordinator and one other key person to induction workshops in June. At that stage an industrial relations problem between the Department of Education and the

teachers' unions developed about an issue that had nothing to do with the new programme. The Minister for Education announced that the launch of Leaving Certificate Applied was being deferred for a year and as a result the proposed June workshops were cancelled. In early August the industrial relations problem was resolved. On 10 August 1995 the Department of Education issued a circular to the schools, that had been represented at the briefing meetings in the preceding May, rescinding the decision to postpone the launch and confirming that the schools in question were authorised to introduce Leaving Certificate Applied in September 1995. The members of the Support Service met for the first time in the last week of August and students were enrolled in the programme in the first week of September 1995.

Due to the uncertainty approximately 20 schools that had been authorised to introduce the programme withdrew. The rescinding of the proposed postponement coupled with the rushed nature of the launch undermined the credibility of the commitment of the Department of Education to the programme. I personally witnessed the general suspicion and in some cases the open hostility displayed by participants in the initial induction workshops organised by the Support Service in September 1995. It was a particularly unsuitable environment in which to introduce teachers to the major change in pedagogy required by cross-curricular learning. The position was further exacerbated by the lack of clarity as to the role of NCCA and the Department of Education. The curriculum was designed by NCCA for approval by the Department of Education, which in turn had responsibility for the provision of summative assessment procedures leading to national certification (Gleeson 1998). The Support Service was responsible to the Department of Education and also reported regularly to NCCA.

The suspicions of teachers and school principals regarding the lack of commitment of the Department of Education to Leaving Certificate Applied were

steadily reduced during 1995-1996 school year by a number of events. The chairperson of the Leaving Certificate Applied steering committee, a successful businessman and politician, involved himself personally in an intensive public relations campaign directed at schools and employers. There is evidence that he involved himself directly with individual school principals in dealing with the Department of Education in relation to problems relating to insurance matters (see p.215). In December 1995 the Department of Education sent a circular to schools (Appendix 9) describing in detail the arrangements for certification of Leaving Certificate Applied 1995-1997. The assessment of cross-curricular tasks took place as planned in January and May 1996 and results were issued on schedule. The Chief Examining Group circulated a report on the assessment of tasks in 1995/96 to schools in November 1996 (Report of Chief Examiner 1996). Special grants for the purchase of information technology and other relevant equipment were paid to schools. The Support Service provided in-career development courses for all teachers who were involved in the programme in 1995/96. A telephone help line was made available and schools were visited as often as requested. Any schools that did not request visits were visited on at least one occasion before the end of the school year 1995/96. Questions were again raised regarding the commitment of the Department of Education to Leaving Certificate Applied, when the assessment of cross-curricular tasks was postponed from January to April 1997 due to an industrial relations dispute involving civil servants in the examinations branch of the Department of Education. Confidence appeared to have been renewed when cross-curricular tasks were assessed in May 1997, oral and written examinations were completed on schedule and a comprehensive report from the Chief Examiner was circulated to schools (Chief Examiner 1997).

The initial uncertainty and suspicions of teachers regarding a lack of commitment to the programme by the Department of Education, coupled with the previous indifferent performances of students generally, provided an inauspicious environment for young people to take a more proactive part in their own learning. Action/interaction strategies relating to management of tasks particularly started badly as a result.

5.4.9.Public Perceptions of Initial Vocational Education

Initial vocational education has a low status level in Irish society, as it is associated with entry at low levels of the labour market. The low status of initial vocational education is further weakened by the major obstacles provided by the Leaving Certificate with regard to future progression to more prestigious positions. The Points system based on student performance in six Leaving Certificate examination subjects is the single most influential factor affecting the future career paths of young Irish people at the beginning of the 21st century.

> *This system dominates the consciousness of students, the work of teachers, and the attitude of parents in post-primary schools* (Dunne 1995:66).

Lynch (1999) claimed that her research had confirmed the difficulties experienced by mature students, who did not have a Leaving Certificate, in gaining access to third-level courses. In recent years a number of reports have stressed the need for the provision of alternative routes to third level for mature students who have progressed in ways other than by Leaving Certificate (Higher Education Authority 1995; Fleming and Murphy 1997; Healy 1998). The position has been further exacerbated by employers who increasingly use the Leaving Certificate as the yardstick for selecting workers for all kinds of positions. As a result, an initial vocational education programme leading to an

alternative qualification, even if it has the words, 'Leaving Certificate', in its name, was regarded initially with a considerable amount of public scepticism. Both students and teachers were distressed by negative comments about Leaving Certificate Applied. The teacher of English and Communications at Inner-city Girls described how her students reacted to a live radio discussion about the programme.

> *There was a radio programme some time ago when people phoned in and wrote in about it. Some negative comments were passed by people who did not know much about it. That affected the girls but they got over it.*

The principal of Market Town Coed described the devastating effect of an article in a tabloid newspaper on the morale of students.

> *One small column in a Sunday newspaper was detrimental to the members of the class who were worried about what acceptability there will be. The newspaper comes out with 'This is for the weaker, less academic students'. That took the wind out of their sails. Students came up to me with that and said 'Look, here is what people say about Leaving Certificate Applied.'*

It was very important for students that the assessment procedures and the resulting certification were given due recognition.

Senator Fergal Quinn, a successful owner of a chain of supermarkets, who was chairman of the Leaving Certificate Applied steering committee (1995-2000), took an active personal role in a public relations exercise aimed at improving the image of the programme. Some teachers expressed disappointment at the impact of the exercise. The Inner-city Girls co-ordinator said:

> *The whole PR thing is a disaster. Employers are still (May 1998) asking students, 'Leaving Certificate Applied? What is that?'*

Senator Quinn was very much aware of the difficulties.

I would not like to underestimate the width of the information gap that exists. ... It is a virtually universal assumption in this country that the traditional Leaving Cert. is a reliable measure of ability. Employers who feel that way are only typical of the wider population. We should not, I suggest, underestimate the difficulty of the task of changing this national perception – nor the length of time until the job is done completely.

Negative public perceptions of initial vocational education adversely affect the self-confidence and self-esteem of young people engaged in programmes such as Leaving Certificate Applied.

5.4.10. Number of Tasks

All the teachers whom I interviewed stressed that nine tasks were too many to be completed in the two-year period. They claimed that the pressure on students to manage three tasks simultaneously was too much. Principals and administrators were unhappy about the personnel demands arising from the assessment of so many tasks. There were recommendations from teachers, principals and inspectors of the Department of Education and Science to reduce the number of tasks. As a result of a review of the programme in 1997-98 the number of tasks was reduced to seven.

5.5. Contextual Conditions

5.5.1. Differing Contexts

The particular sets of contextual conditions, within which the eight linked sequences of action/interaction strategies were taken to implement cross-curricular tasks in the three case study schools, differed significantly. The principal contextual conditions related to the ethos of school, leadership styles of principals and co-ordinators, student/teacher relationships, specialised role of teachers, expertise of teachers, general attitudes to assessment and quality of school/community links. The differences between the schools with regard to location, size or type of school do not appear to have had any significant influence on the way the students managed the tasks. There were not any significant differences between the schools on socio-economic grounds as the great majority of the students were all disadvantaged to varying degrees.

5.5.2. School Ethos

Conditions relating to school ethos were particularly significant. There were clear differences in the levels of acceptance of the Leaving Certificate Applied students in the three schools. In two cases it appeared that the schools were attempting to adapt to the needs of the students in implementing Leaving Certificate Applied, whereas in the third case the students were expected to adapt to the existing school routine.

The treatment of Leaving Certificate Applied students in Inner-city Girls appeared to be quite consistent with the school's mission statement "to provide an educational environment suited to the needs of each individual within the demands of a changing world". The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Leaving Certificate Applied spoke of the school's ethos.

In keeping with our ethos here at Inner-city Girls, we are catering for all

abilities. But we are very interested in the weaker children who need this special help. We don't want them to leave us with a chip on the shoulder and feeling inadequate ...

There was a clear school policy of trying to ensure that Leaving Certificate Applied students would feel as much part of the school as any other students. The timetable was arranged deliberately so that they were distributed through the other Leaving Certificate classes for Religion and Physical Education.

We got on grand with the other Leaving Certificate girls. I don't really know them that well ...we're with them for PE and Religion...I don't talk to them that much because we're with them for only four classes...we have RE 3 times and PE once, Debbie said.

The principal of Inner-city Girls described the low levels of the students' self-esteem at the beginning of Leaving Certificate Applied course.

They start off with very low self-esteem in 5th year, but by the time they finish 6th year they really have grown by leaps and bounds... They have changed, they have matured, they have grown in self-esteem.

Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory, that I administered in October of the second year of the course, showed that the levels of self-esteem within the Leaving Certificate Applied class group in Inner-city Girls ranged from very low (4/25) to very high (22/25). The principal described the way in which she had tried to respond to their sensitivities and avoid a feeling of 'them and us' developing between them and the other students.

I think the LCA have lots of little privileges built into the programme and therefore they feel happy and satisfied.

She appeared to be prepared to listen to any complaints that they might have.

On the odd occasion, if the general ordinary Leaving Certificates are called for some specific reason to the library - it's our place where we meet a large number of students - there may be a complaint from the LCA saying, well, we're Leaving Certs too - why don't you call us?

She described the difficulty that arose when the Leaving Certificate Applied students felt excluded from an important liturgical event in the life of the school.

... we do a special Christmas or Easter liturgy each year and the ordinary first year Leaving Certs prepare that liturgy because the 4 religion classes are timetabled at the same time. Now the LCAs were wondering why weren't they in on it. We had to explain to them that they were going out on work experience and that they could not be involved in the preparation.

The principal described how the PE teacher solved the problem for her by presenting the students with a challenge.

The PE teacher, who teaches dance, decided to do liturgical dance with them. Now they were preparing but they got cold feet along the way. Eventually she cajoled and coaxed them into doing it on the day and they felt proud of themselves. You see while they might on the one hand feel that they're left out when it really comes to the crunch they're slow enough in taking on the offer of doing something because they say "Oh, we feel mortified, we feel embarrassed". So deep down they can be shy.

The Inner-city Girls English/Communications teacher stressed the need to keep reassuring the students.

They did feel different. You had to keep saying to them ... that it was a Leaving Certificate as far as I was concerned.

She made it very clear that any denigration of them by other students would not be

tolerated.

They accept them as far as I know, but then I suppose nobody would say to me that they were lesser because I don't think that I would put up with that.

The Inner-city Girls teacher of German was emphatic that other Leaving Certificate students did not consider Leaving Certificate Applied students to be inferior to themselves.

Ó Donnabháin: *And how do the other Leaving Certificate students regard them?*

Teacher: *They're grand - no problem. Well they are separate entities if you like but they do come together - they're all under the same branch - they're all 6th years.*

Ó Donnabháin: *They don't look down on them?*

Teacher: *No! absolutely not, no!*

The Inner-city Girls Hotel/Catering/Tourism teacher described how she presented the Leaving Certificate Applied course in a positive light to other students.

I certainly make it my business to tell the ordinary 5th years and Leaving Certs what's going on in LCA, and all the great things that we do, not just from a promotional point of view, but also to let them know how good the students are. If they're putting on a catering event in the library, I tell them to have a look when they're passing at what the LCAs are actually doing. I think it's important for them to know and for LCA to get a good press because it deserves it in actual fact.

She believed that other students respected the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and were possibly envious of the people who were participating in it.

I'd only be surmising ... but I think that other students respect the course. I think

they are envious at times of the things the LCAs do.

She was very definite that the students following Leaving Certificate Applied had very positive views about the course.

... as far as I can see, they see themselves as equal citizens - that's the first thing, and they're very quick to point that out. A few of the comments I've heard recently would be things like 'Look at all this work that we have to do and those Leaving Certs sitting over there doing nothing!' And that's a direct quote!

The acceptance of Leaving Certificate Applied students was a much slower process in Market Town Coed. In May 1997, the principal described the negative reaction of the teaching staff to each of the two cohorts of students that had begun the programme in 1995 and 1996.

I know that overall when the Leaving Certificate Applied starts each year up until Christmas time staff reaction to the Leaving Certificate Applied is dreadful. They seem lost ...they don't seem to know what they are doing...they are all mixed up. There are different ability levels. From both other teachers and those that have them themselves there would be constant criticism for the first term.

The principal described the dramatic change in the attitude of the teachers to the students over the two-year course. In the first half-year teachers appeared to be in despair.

... it's almost like a revolution among staff who say 'Oh God, I can't ... they are an awful class' and so on...

It appeared that the students had great difficulty in coming to terms with the changed approach to schoolwork.

...it takes such a long time for a new group to see the light at the end of the tunnel...

The principal believed that "when the first Task is assessed is the first time" that the students understood what the course was about. The teachers, who were interviewed, talked in very positive terms about Leaving Certificate Applied students, who in turn spoke warmly about the teachers. Other Leaving Certificate students did not wish to be associated with them however. The co-ordinator explained how the other Leaving Certificate students had attempted to exclude Leaving Certificate Applied students from the annual School Debutantes Ball.

The other Leaving Certs were planning their Debs for next September and initially they did not want the Leaving Certificate Applied to be associated with them ... ...anyway the teachers started to organise the Debs and they are now part of it...I think the other Leaving Certificate students do distance themselves from the Leaving Certificate Applied ...the other Leaving Certs do look on themselves as being superior beings.

The principal of Market Town Coed believed that himself and his colleagues had to take responsibility for the prejudice displayed by other students.

Somehow it's among ourselves that the prejudice starts. Within the school different teachers may be perceived to have different attitudes towards different students. We are mainly responsible ourselves for the divisions between students. It is our perceptions that the students will pick up on very quickly.

The position of Leaving Certificate Applied students at Rural Coed was very different from Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed. There were indications that they were being tolerated rather than accepted by a significant number of teachers.

The co-ordinator informed me that "many of our teachers just cannot come to accept the

changed approaches that Leaving Certificate Applied students demand, expect or require". A member of the staff, who was not being formally interviewed, approached me of his own volition to express his disapproval of the attitude of his colleagues. He claimed to have heard a number of the senior teachers agreeing in the staff room that it was ruining the school to be keeping such students. He claimed that the senior teachers in question agreed that "the school would be better off if the Leaving Certificate Applied students were gone". Furthermore he claimed that on a field trip a small number of Leaving Certificate Applied students complained to him that some teachers were not taking classes with themselves very seriously.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed complained that Leaving Certificate Applied students had not been accepted by the other Leaving Certificate students from the beginning and that no effort had been made by the school authorities to integrate them.

> *They have had to force their way into the Grad.*(graduation dinner/dance) *and the Retreat* (a religious exercise), he said.

The principal disagreed. He claimed that the other students had accepted them, but that their conduct and language were not acceptable sometimes.

> *They do accept them! In fact we had a graduation mass for the Leaving Certs of this year and the majority of the LCA were there and they took their place along with the rest of the 5th years as we call the Senior class - they're 5th years - and they're quite acceptable. Now, their behaviour sometimes is not acceptable, and their language, but then I suppose that's common among all young people.*

Three students from Rural Coed referred to their relations with other Leaving Certificate students. Aidan felt that he got on very well with them, but he would not agree that they worked harder than he did.

Nora agreed.

I get on grand with them... they never make any comment at all about our course apart from saying how are you getting on.

Billy thought differently.

I don't think they think much of us. They think we are dossers, I'd say.

The principal of Rural Coed described the difficulty they were having in recruiting participants to join Leaving Certificate Applied for the school years 1997-1999.

There's a certain resistance to it now among the weaker ones in the present third years.

He said that the course had a poor image among parents

There was too much free time or they were seen to be aimlessly going around and maybe being disruptive or bold or that, but that they were seemingly walking around without much purpose

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed blamed the way they had introduced Leaving Certificate Applied to the school. He described how the course got off to a bad start in that it was not given the same status as the traditional Leaving Certificate.

I think in our school here, we have not elevated it to the level that it should have been... I think we're now only beginning to see that the LCA is actually the equivalent of the traditional Leaving Certificate and should stand on its own side by side along with it. And I think that in future we will be approaching it from a different point of view - we will be putting it on a much stronger footing than it is. Because the fact that we got off to a bad start has meant that students are now seeing it as a programme for people who are very weak and can't do the ordinary Leaving Cert. But very weak kids, you know, even if you're of below average ability you wouldn't think of doing the LCA - you're way above that.

The harsh climate of Rural Coed for Leaving Certificate Applied students was in stark contrast with the affirming support that was provided from the start for their counterparts in Inner-city Girls and after an initial period of turbulence in Market Town Coed. The supportive climate in the latter schools, reflected in the styles of leadership displayed by both principal and co-ordinator in each and in the improving student/teacher relationships as the course progressed, appeared to have a positive effect on each of the eight sequences of action/interaction strategies. On the other hand action/interaction strategies generally were greatly constrained by the less than friendly climate experienced by Leaving Certificate Applied students in Rural Coed. The negative effects of the school ethos on the students in question were counteracted to a certain extent by the inspirational work of the co-ordinator, who appeared to have built up a positive adult relationship with each of them.

5.5.3. Leadership Styles of Principals

The leadership styles of the principals in the three schools were markedly different. The principal of Inner-city Girls had a very democratic style. She delegated widely but remained in touch with both teachers and students and appeared to be prepared to provide support at all times in an unobtrusive manner. The principal of Market Town Coed had a very charismatic proactive style. He was prepared to take on the responsibilities of a member of the teaching team personally and to provide overt support for the co-ordinator. The principal of Rural Coed delegated the entire responsibility for Leaving Certificate Applied to the co-ordinator and did not appear to become actively involved with either teachers or students.

The principal of Inner-city Girls described how she had adapted to Leaving Certificate Applied. She described how she worried about "students going into town

and hoping that they were fully covered by the school insurance policy." She accepted that the cross-curricular tasks caused a certain amount of disruption and she was afraid sometimes "that the students could just be moving around the school wasting time". She welcomed the introduction by the co-ordinator of a logbook where students were required to sign their names as to what they were doing when they were moving out of class. She expressed her trust in the teachers.

> *I trust that the teachers are doing their job as best they can and being as responsible as possible in relation to where students are. I think we train the students in trust. I think they respond. I think by the end of two years they're quite responsible ...*

The principal of Rural Coed was absent from school for long periods as he was chronically ill. He resigned on the grounds of ill-health at the end of the period in question. As a result the management of Leaving Certificate Applied was almost entirely delegated to the co-ordinator by default. The principal confined himself to deal with administrative matters. While he did not interact with students on a regular basis, he actively campaigned to have the necessary measures put in place relating to insurance cover for students on work experience. He described how the chairman of the Leaving Certificate Applied steering committee lobbied the Department Of Education on his behalf to have the position clarified regarding the insurance cover of students of community schools while on work experience.

> *I could phone him almost any time that I wished because we were very concerned that the year was going by and we had no insurance. We had to withdraw the youngsters - that was in their first year - from work experience because there was no insurance for them. So he eventually kept at it until he got it, I think it was last year - February of last year - and he rang me straight*

away, his office rang me, and this year I've been on to him several times about different things ...

The principals of both Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed provided positive leadership in relation to Leaving Certificate Applied as compared to the administrative support of the Rural Coed principal. They both appeared to have selected teachers for the programme, who had the necessary flexibility to change from subject-centred teaching to facilitating person-centred learning. They appeared to have made every effort to ensure that teachers attended all in-career development workshops organised on schooldays and they made their own school premises available for week-end workshops. They arranged for teachers from their schools to attend different promotional events relating to Leaving Certificate Applied and they publicised activities relating to the programme in the local media. On the negative side neither of them timetabled regular meetings of the teaching team, despite the fact that they overtly encouraged greater collaboration by teachers.

5.5.4. Leadership Styles of Co-ordinators

The co-ordinators in Inner-city Girls, Market Town Coed and Rural Coed were all deeply committed to their work. Each of them displayed considerable sensitivity and understanding in the interactions with students that I observed. Each of them appeared to have developed a very positive one-to-one relationship with Leaving Certificate Applied students at the time of my first visits to the case study schools towards the end of the first year of the Leaving Certificate Applied course. The most significant difference between co-ordinators was in relation to the degree of autonomy that they allowed students to have. The Inner-city Girls co-ordinator allowed students to have an increasing degree of autonomy in the management of tasks, while the other two did not.

Three students at Inner-city Girls complained to me in May 1996, the first year of their course, that they were not being allowed to select their own topics for tasks.

I think we should have been allowed to choose our topics ourselves, said one. The co-ordinator explained a year later the manner in which the choosing of topics evolved over the two-year period.

> *The way they choose in 5th and 6th year is different. If I cast my mind back to the first year of the course, I'd say that the teacher put the name of the topic on the blackboard - kids panicked, hadn't a clue what they were doing. Then at the end of the day it came down really to a discussion with the teacher and the teacher basically selecting what would be best for them to do based on their ability. But in the second year of the course they don't want that any more - they don't want to be told what to do.*

The Inner-city Girls teacher of English/Communications did not quite agree.

> *As long as I feel they would have enough to work on in the topic they want to do. Some tasks seem to have more in them than others. And then, because of what I've just said about their reading skills... Some of them just wouldn't have the ability to select realistically for themselves.*

The Inner-city Girls teacher of German said that both herself and the students felt quite constrained anchoring a series of tasks in the German module.

> *I listed the areas and they were asked to choose...*

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls was enthusiastically in favour of allowing students to choose the topic not only within the subject area but also within their own interests.

> *So we try to be as flexible as possible in allowing the students to choose a task which they would be interested in, because usually then they'll do better in it if*

they have a genuine interest in it.

However, she stressed the enabling, guiding role that she saw for herself.

Ó Donnabháin: *Are they capable of making wise decisions themselves about choosing tasks?*

Teacher: *Well, they make a lot of decisions. Some of them are not wise at all and some of them are. So I suppose that's part of my duty - to guide them. Now, they do need a lot of guidance in coming up with tasks.*

All the students interviewed welcomed the freedom to choose topics for themselves. They were particularly pleased with tasks relating to topics in which they had a personal interest. Gerri claimed that the task she had enjoyed most was about Alcoholics Anonymous. She explained that she used the task as a means of helping herself to deal with a family problem.

I was worried about my sisters and brothers, who were drinking a lot. It showed me how easy it is to become an alcoholic and how hard it is to deal with it.

She used another task to investigate the rights of children vis-à-vis their parents. She showed considerable knowledge of recent legislation on childcare and the accompanying debate.

My aim is to find out how much the child can do without the parents being there.

She said that she had not enjoyed the task, but it appeared to have helped her

I had a little problem at home but I have sorted that out since.

Eithne was very pleased with the task her friend and herself had done regarding teenage pregnancies.

We picked the topic without being given a list.

Lucy was pleased that she had been able to do an investigation of youth unemployment

in her own locality.

I have 8 sisters and 4 of them are unemployed. I don't want to be unemployed. I have seen so many people unemployed struggling through life and I don't want that for myself. Even before the teacher gave us out newspapers to help us find a topic I wanted to do unemployment. Last year we had to do what the teacher said but this year we pick ourselves.

Joan talked about the task that she had chosen for herself about teenage drinking. She explained that she had written to different organisations and interviewed people in the Health Board. She said that she had already collected "masses of information" when she decided to change from the topic of teenage drinking to the topic of alcohol and pregnant women.

The co-ordinator was particularly pleased at the way in which the students had responded to the freedom that she had given to them. She stressed the motivating power of topics that related directly to the lives of the students.

The tasks they did on helping agencies in their community they absolutely loved those. They all had experiences in their families in which those agencies could have helped. We're talking about agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous, CURA (a counselling service regarding unwanted pregnancies), Gamblers Anonymous ...If the tasks relate directly to their life experiences, they get a lot out of those tasks, because they put in a lot and they are willing to put it in.

She stressed the importance of listening to what the young people have to say.

They have a huge need to be listened to... And I think this is one of the fantastic things about the Leaving Certificate Applied programme - that teachers have time to listen to them. I think a lot of them aren't listened to at home. If they can be listened to in class they can bring a lot of life experiences to the class

and they can actually help other people in the class as well.

The gradual evolving of students taking an increasing responsibility for the choice of topics and the management of their tasks in Inner-city Girls was in sharp contrast to the position in the other case study schools. The co-ordinator in Market Town Coed, who had responsibility for social studies, made her position clear.

I don't think they would be able to cope with an awful lot of choice because you would find some of them frittering from one thing to another and not settling down.

The principal of Market Town Coed who had responsibility for English and Communications was much less autocratic in his approach, but he was in a minority in the team.

I give them quite a bit of latitude. Some people come up with ideas themselves. I would suggest areas that they might like to cover. The first task that they do I would be a little more specific... After they have done the first task I give them a good lot of latitude ... I throw out ideas that they might like to follow and so let them come up with suggestions themselves.

The ICT teacher at Market Town Coed explained that there were constraints in devising tasks anchored in an ICT module. However he tried to give his students as much variety as possible.

They have a big choice. For the task that I had they had a choice of 15 tasks. I listed 15 and gave them a choice...they were all cross-curricular tasks... Two students opted for the same one. I had nine students altogether.... the remaining seven each picked a different task.

The Technology teacher at Market Town Coed explained why he could not give students much choice.

At the start not a lot...they were told what they had to do.... they were shown what had to be done because they had never come across these products before In some cases they had come across these products but they had never read the instructions....had never worked them properly.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed said that after initial discussions with the students the decisions rested with the teachers.

I would say that the students don't have a whole pile of freedom in that. We would look at areas from which tasks could come. They would nominate a number of things and then it would be chosen. I suppose the final say would rest with the teacher that was anchoring the task.

There was a clear difference between the co-ordinator in Market Town Coed and her counterparts in the other two schools in relation to task management. All three co-ordinators agreed that there were too many tasks. In Market Town Coed the co-ordinator staggered the tasks by drawing up a specific deadline for each task that ensured that students would only be dealing with one task at any particular time.

The difference in approach by co-ordinators regarding choice of topics appeared to have had a major influence on the level of responsibility taken by individual students for their tasks in the different schools. By the middle of the second year of the programme students of all abilities in Inner-city Girls were taking ownership of their particular tasks. In Market Town Coed only a small number did so. In Rural Coed tasks were generally regarded as assignments set by the teachers and a means of getting credits.

The arrangement by the Market Town Coed co-ordinator regarding separate deadlines for the completion of tasks was a serious constraint on strategies aimed at developing self-organisational skills. The arrangement deprived the students of an

opportunity to develop time management skills and took the responsibility for an important element of task management back to the teachers.

5.5.5. Student/Teacher Relationships

There were wide differences between the nature of student/teacher relationships in the three case study schools. In two schools where the principal and members of the teaching team were flexible in their approach, cross-curricular tasks appeared to have contributed to a significant growth in mutual understanding during the two-year period.

The principal of Market Town Coed led by example by becoming a member of the Leaving Certificate Applied teaching team with responsibility for English and Communications. While fully accepting the co-ordinator as team leader, he provided on–going support for her. He described the difference between his relationship with Leaving Certificate Applied students and with other Leaving Certificate students. He was practising two different modes of teaching with the two groups. It appeared that he instructed the Leaving Certificate group with the aid of notes as he rushed to 'cover' a long syllabus, while it was a more 'adult collegial' interaction with the Leaving Certificate Applied students, who frequently did additional work on their own initiative..

> *My attitude to them and their attitude towards me would be different than another Leaving Certificate class. It would be far more personal between me as a teacher and as a principal in that we would tend to be working together. I would give out to these in a more...fatherly way. If I am teaching English to Leaving Certificate I have a syllabus to cover and I have to get so much covered in a class.... So it is 'please pay attention and take down notes' and the like. With Leaving Certificate Applied several times students have volunteered work*

for me... the attitude would be far more collegial and adult...

He explained that they felt that they had such an adult working relationship with him that they were offended on occasions when he disciplined them in the same way that he disciplined other students.

Inner-city Girls students were very conscious of the change in their relationship with teachers as is illustrated by the following comments:

- *I can relate to them more easily and talk about things;*
- *It's not schoolwork. It's about learning for yourself and you can have a better relationship with the teacher;*
- *They are a lot more helpful in this part of the programme;*
- *I find it easier to work with my teacher on the task because she is calm about it and she is always there for us.*

They appeared to be conscious of a clearly defined change in teacher behaviour. In an interview in April 1997 Gerri elaborated.

> *It's not the teachers jumping on your back to get your homework done... you actually get a chance to investigate what you like done and what sort of career you would like. Teachers are completely different to us because if I was in a normal maths class doing honours math we'd have to do a load of work, all copying and everything ...now she's more calm inside...*

A teacher of German in Inner-city Girls talked about the change in her relationship with the students between doing language drills with them and allowing them to work on their own on cross-curricular tasks:

When they're working on their tasks they're independent, they're doing their own thing - they're just asking you for help when they need it, whereas when I'm in

there doing my verbs - well not verbs as such but doing language drills with them ... obviously they're not as much in tune or whatever. They prefer working - they like to work on their own - they've developed that - they like to find out on their own what's relevant to them...

It's very hard to be in there going around the class and getting them to say "My name is..." because they're not interested in what your woman's name is. They only want to say it themselves. I find that I have to do it individually with them and get them to practise on their own rather ... they won't listen to 15 other people telling them about their families - they WILL but they're switching off.

In the task they have their own thing, they know what they're doing and they're very organised - 90% of them have their reports on their own little things.

A Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls attributed her improved relationship with students specifically to working with them on a cross-curricular task. She compared the relationship she had with a Leaving Certificate Applied class that had done a task under her direction with the relationship she had with another Leaving Certificate Applied class that had not done a task with her.

> *From the time that I did my first task with them the whole atmosphere in the class changed - we all became better friends if I could put it that way... I actually noticed because I didn't do a task this year with Year 5 LCAs that I don't feel as much part of a team with them as I did with last year's group. And I think it's because I didn't do a task with them. Funnily enough.*

Peter was effusive in his praise of his teachers at Market Town Coed.

Yes, they are all great especially XXX and YYY ...

Two teachers from Market Town Coed other than the above mentioned XXX or YYY explained how cross-curricular tasks affected their relationship with students.

A teacher of Mathematics and ICT reflected the views of the Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls (above).

I have these students for maths and I have them for the task and I have others that I don't have for the task. There is a definite difference in the relationship.

A teacher of Construction and Manufacturing at Market Town Coed talked about the more casual relationship he developed with students while working on tasks.

They would make more free with you. They would be more open and I suppose I'd be more open with them to an extent. You certainly get to know them better.

The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed also stressed the fact that tasks helped her to get to know the students better.

I suppose there is really...a more casual relationship and they bend many rules... there would be a difference all right. They would make more free with you and they would be more open. I suppose I'd be more open with them to an extent...you certainly would get to know them better.

Angela (Market Town Coed) did not see any difference between the teachers.

I think they are all the same...if you want help they will give you help. All the teachers will ...

The climate in Rural Coed appeared to be very different from that at Inner-city Girls or Market Town Coed. Tony said that teachers were unchanged but that Leaving Certificate Applied gave students an opportunity to do things that they were capable of doing.

The teachers are the same way basically but you are able to do it. If you are lazy naturally enough they'll be on to you but you are able to do it. It's totally different when you are not able to do it and they are on to you ... it's totally different. If you are out there now in an ordinary Leaving Certificate class

doing those Maths or doing that English or doing that Engineering or whatever they are down on you the whole time. If you are not able for it, you are forced out of school in a kind of way. A lot of lads in the past I'm sure did not want to be at school but they had to.... there was no other way and when this course came in it was a godsend really.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed agreed with Tony.

I think that we have found in this school that the students who could not achieve in the standard run-of-the-mill courses have adapted very well. I will tell you out straight that they would never have survived without the LCA. It's able to deal with them at their own level and at their own ability.

Aidan (Rural Coed) felt that relations with the teachers were improving.

Ó Donnabháin: *How are you getting on with your teachers?*

Aidan: *Ah not too bad. They are all right now. There are no rows.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Are you getting on better with them now than when you did your Junior Cert?*

Aidan: *Yes,I am getting to know them better. I get on fairly well with them.*

A teacher of Horticulture at Rural Coed explained that he behaved differently with Leaving Certificate Applied to how he behaved with other students.

You see my relationship with them isn't the same as with an ordinary Leaving Cert class. They don't come in here and sit down and have exercises done for the day and listen and take down notes. You just can't treat them that way.

The teacher was very pleased at the manner in which students had worked on a group task to build a rockery at the front of the school. He stressed the need to keep them actively engaged.

You really have to have something going on in the class. You need something

that you can show them or something they'll do.

He had obviously experienced disciplinary problems.

If you tried to even tell them something that you might think they should be interested in it doesn't mean that they'll pay one bit of attention to you. ...They're not very disciplined, particularly if you have 22 in the class. They're not disciplined like an ordinary class. You could have this class here and get in your Ordinary Leaving Certificate class next class, and there's the world of difference - they're poles apart.

He described how he had tried to adapt to Leaving Certificate Applied students even though at times it was very trying.

I would say I have adapted to them. Although sometimes I can be infuriated. A classic example was where I was pricking out plants over there. I was showing them how it was done. A fellow was sitting opposite me there. I just turned round to look at a bit of information on the seed and potting compost. When I turned round he was emptying a bottle of lemonade that he had taken out of his bag into the tray. So I mean you ...

A teacher of Irish at Rural Coed appeared to have had a very negative relationship with Leaving Certificate Applied students. She expressed great anger at what she felt she had to endure from them. She deplored the fact that they would be leaving the school "without basic manners". She said that she personally would not employ eight of them because they were "so uncouth and unhelpful". The principal of Rural Coed, who did not become personally involved in the course, disagreed completely with the teacher of Irish.

"They are very approachable, mature and adult young men", he said to the teacher of Irish in my presence. The principal of Rural Coed felt that allowances should be made

for the home environment of some of the students.

> *In one case the father has been unemployed for a very long time and the mother is very careless about the appearance of the house. In another the mother has gone to live in England, and the student goes to live with her during school holidays.*

The principal believed that there had been a marked improvement in the social skills of the students during the two-year course.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed appeared to play a pivotal role in maintaining a working relationship between students and teachers. The delegation of responsibility to the co-ordinator appeared to be almost total as the principal was often absent for long periods. The principal stressed the contribution of the co-ordinator to the course.

> *It's a huge task for our co-ordinator. If we didn't have him with enough hours to deal with it adequately, which he just about has, I think it would be a huge change for teachers.*

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed believed that all the teachers should combine in trying to raise the image of Leaving Certificate Applied in the school.

So we have a good bit of work to do in correcting the poor image it has. Every teacher in the school has to do it - not alone the co-ordinator. We also have to try and build the LCA class into the structures in the school that apply to the ordinary Leaving Cert like the Grads dance, like having regular contact with the chaplain,like having easy access to the careers office. All that type of thing - they have to be allowed to be part of this from the word go.

He attributed some of the disciplinary problems they had experienced to the fact that Leaving Certificate Applied students felt isolated.

> *... they find themselves isolated. That's what we found and they were getting*

difficult to manage and we have learned. We have made attempts to put them back in and a lot of them have come back. They're very good students at the moment. Actually one of our Leaving Certificate Applied students was nominated for the Student of the Year in the school.

In two schools student/teacher relationships appeared to have had a positive effect on all eight action/interaction sequences. In the third school the poor quality of student/teacher relationships was a major constraint on cross-curricular tasks.

I found it strange that some of the teachers involved in Leaving Certificate Applied in the three case study schools referred to the participants, who were teenagers in the 16-19 age group as "children". I did not ask anyone about it as I felt that the question might inhibit the flow of information that I was getting. It appeared to indicate reluctance on the part of the teachers in question to change from a paternalistic to a more adult relationship with the students.

5.5.6. Scale of Change for Teachers

The differing scales of change for teachers were an important contextual condition influencing the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in the three case study schools. The results of the standardised tests and the profiles of the students, who were interviewed, indicate the diversity of the young people involved in each of the case study schools. While there was a general deficit in relation to vocabulary, the intellectual capability ranged from significantly above average to those who were seriously disadvantaged intellectually, their levels of self-esteem ranged from one extreme to the other, and their self-concepts of themselves as learners were in many cases quite contradictory (see Section 5.4.2. above). The evidence showed that in each of very different schools the Leaving Certificate Applied classgroup required flexible

methodologies suited to the needs of a mixed ability group. Mixed ability teaching involving individualised learning and various forms of group work has never been widely practised in second level schools in Ireland. It has practically disappeared entirely since the introduction in the early 1990s of three levels Higher, Ordinary and Foundation in Irish, English and Mathematics and Higher and Ordinary levels for all other subjects at Junior Certificate.

Leaving Certificate Applied was a major change for the majority of the students. They had been accustomed to working with a didactic form of teaching where the teacher did most of the talking and they sat with their text books and prepared for a written examination at the end of the course.

It was also a major change for teachers as noted by the principal of Rural Coed.

> *It's a different style of teaching and a different style of movement - a lot of movement and action and activity, not so much emphasis on sitting in class and listening to the teacher but learning by doing.*

The facilitation of inquiry based learning and experience based learning, the organisation of group learning and the promotion of self-evaluation appeared to present teachers who had become routinised in a narrow range of didactic methodologies with major challenges. The following description by the co-ordinator appears to capture the scale of the change that the introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied involved in Rural Coed.

> *Here you had a new programme being launched in on top of staff members where they were teaching a block of information not from a book but from a set of guidelines made up in the Dept. of Education. They had to turn around their whole teaching methods. Usually they went to a book, they opened the book "We're doing Chapter so-and-so". Now they had to go and get information and*

put it into format for students.

The level of ability of the students and the previous fractious relationships that many of them had with teachers made it more difficult for teachers to change.

Then you had thrown into that, students from probably the lower spectrum of ability.

The introduction of cross-curricular tasks was a major challenge, as it tended to break up the normal didactic routine with the teacher standing at the front of the class the students working in unison with him.

Then you were introducing tasks, which can be very disruptive within a class because everybody can be doing something different. And all this disarray coming to teachers who were so used to a fairly ordered set-up within class. They found difficulty coping with it and they got frustrated.

The scale of change in Rural Coed, brought by cross-curricular tasks, was so great that student/teacher relationships deteriorated initially.

I felt that some of the frustration was being taken out on the children because they were constantly saying "you can't do this and you can't do that". The kids were very noisy and saying "we don't understand this and we don't understand that". Whereas in a standard class you would be doing a particular topic and all the questions would relate to that topic. You could be in a Leaving Certificate Applied class and there could be questions coming from different groups of children who were doing different things at the same time. Teachers had difficulty coping with that.

The principal of Rural Coed accepted that it was a major change but he claimed that both teachers and students had adapted well to the change.

But they adapted very well, as we always do here. I think we adapt very quickly

to change and we've been used to it. People had to adapt to it and they have done that very well - the teachers and the pupils.

I did not find any evidence to support the opinion of the principal, who conceded however that the teachers in Rural Coed did not like disruptions of their normal routine.

Other teachers might feel that they would prefer fewer disruptions in the school in general - most of the teachers would feel that way.

The teacher with responsibility for Agriculture/Horticulture at Rural Coed was very much in favour of keeping to the established routine.

When you take students out of the ordinary Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate it's very difficult. It takes a lot more time and hard work and personnel to motivate those people and keep them occupied. From my experience of teaching that is a fact. If they have a set examination at the end of the time and they see it as important it motivates them. There is no doubt about it. If you take them out of the traditional Leaving Certificate or Junior Certificate like I said they tend to lose direction. It creates problems for schools. It demands more resources and time and effort to keep them going in learning.

The principal of Market Town Coed agreed that the introduction of inquiry based learning was a major change for teachers in his school.

The greatest difficulty is that first of all there is not a tradition of learning through inquiry in the traditional education system. We tend to use set rules and set examples which teachers give to people. If you follow this path everything will be OK.

The introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied did not cause any great problem in Inner-city Girls as there was already a long tradition of innovation in the school. The

school had already implemented the Senior Certificate, the precursor of Leaving Certificate Applied, for eleven years.

> *I suppose the fact that we've had Senior Certificate in the school since 1984. Teachers have learned to work together as a team - they've learned to co-operate. It's just that we've all done it and I did it myself as a teacher in Senior Certificate. I think the tradition has helped us immensely.*

The English/Communications teacher at Inner-city Girls commented on the reaction of colleagues, who did not have previous experience of innovative initiatives.

> *I worked for a long time in the Senior Certificate programme so it wasn't that difficult for me to make the transition from the Senior Certificate to the Leaving Certificate Applied. But I could see that teachers, who had worked totally in the academic Leaving Certificate, might have found it a bigger shock.*

The scale of change involved for teachers ranged from very great in the case of Rural Coed, considerable in the case of Market Town Coed, not very significant in the case of Inner-city Girls. While the principal of Rural Coed suggested that his staff was capable of adapting to change, the evidence indicated that teachers had become routinised in a narrow set of didactic methodologies and resisted change. The Market Town Coed principal accepted that both himself and his colleagues felt inadequate in relation to inquiry based learning and formative assessment, but he and his colleagues indicated their willingness to change. Inner-city Girls had been engaged in a process of modernisation over the preceding 18 years through participating in a number of innovations. As a result Inner-city Girls teachers were familiar with a wider range of pedagogical strategies and were more willing to analyse critically their own strategies than their counterparts in the other schools.

5.5.7. Management Skills of Teachers

None of the case study schools had regular meetings of the teaching team. There were meetings at the beginning of the year, but they were not held on a regular basis. The principal of Market Town Coed admitted:

> *Initially we were very good at meetings. We are not quite as good at the moment at getting together and trying to co-ordinate the tasks.*

The principal of Inner-city Girls appeared to think that informal briefings were adequate in her school.

> **Principal:** *On a human level our staff seem to be very caring for each other. In time of bereavement, or sickness or other difficulties, our teachers seem to be quite united and they have a good sense of supporting each other. And that seems to affect the Leaving Certificate Applied in that they work as a team there too.*
>
> **Ó Donnabháin:** *Do you use the timetable to bring them together regularly?*
>
> Principal: *Not really. It's informal. This morning now was a good example. They remained back for five minutes after the tea break to sort out handing out letters to students in relation to the allocation of workplaces for work experience placements.*

The Inner-city Girls co-ordinator confirmed that the atmosphere in the staffroom contributed to teamwork among teachers.

> *We've a very close teaching staff here - that's one of the lovely things about teaching in this school. It's really really close, and people would be interested in what you're doing in a task and they're always asking can they help out in some way.*

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls regretted that the members

of the teaching team did not have regular meetings.

> *In theory we'd love to sit down and plan with each other... Unfortunately, we don't tend to have time to do that. I would love a 40-minute session where teachers could meet each other ... even once a month and plan these things, but it's not possible at the moment.*

The teaching teams in schools appeared to have made similar arrangements regarding the monitoring of tasks at the beginning of the school year.

> **Co-ordinator at market Town Coed:** *Last June and again in September we had a meeting. There were three tasks to be done by the end of January by the second year group. We decided who was going to take responsibility for what and we gave a deadline so that the three would not be all done together on the last week.*
>
> **Co-ordinator at Rural Coed**: *We sit down and look at it in September. We outline the amount of work that has to be done between September and January. We go through the modules first that are going to be covered and then we look at the tasks. There are 2 tasks to be carried out in the first term and 3 in the second term in the first year. So we would place those before the different groups of teachers and we would explain that the task has to be anchored in a particular area. And then we would ask for volunteers from teachers who are working in a particular area "Would you like to anchor a task?" And in so far as we possibly can we ensure that every teacher that's teaching on the course anchors at least one task during the lifetime of that particular Leaving Certificate Applied class. We find it works well.*
>
> *The teacher who anchors them does most of the monitoring. But I myself go around to see how they're progressing and fix the final date for acceptance of*

folders.

Co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls: *It's usually up to the co-ordinator to call a meeting of all teachers. We usually put the overhead of the curriculum on the OHP and break the course down into the elements and explain what teachers are involved in each element. We had a good number of meetings about tasks at the very beginning. We explained what a task was, the role of the anchor person. We stressed that integration was of the utmost importance. And then we basically left it up to the teachers in each element to get together there and then and decide who would be the anchor persons in this session and how the other subjects could link in. So there were 3 groups of teachers based on each element and it was decided then. It worked very well. If I were doing it again I would plan the tasks right throughout the 2 years. The teachers of specialisms are very overloaded with tasks. I'd plan it over the 2 years so that the timing of the tasks would suit the teachers and suit their other classes as well. And the tasks could be spread out so that they are fairly spread out between the staff as well.*

The lack of regular meetings had an adverse effect on the management of tasks in all three schools. The monitoring of each individual task appears to have been left entirely to a particular individual, so that it seems that the level of support and facilitation of curriculum integration depended on the attitude of each teacher to cross-curricularity. It was very difficult for the co-ordinator to intervene. The principal of Inner-city Girls depended on the camaraderie that existed in the staff to generate teamwork. In Rural Coed there was one clear example where a dedicated teacher took complete ownership of a group task, anchored in his own modules, and successfully resisted an attempt by the co-ordinator to link the task to other modules (see p.255).

5.5.8. Teacher expertise in facilitating Critical Thinking

The level of emphasis on critical thinking varied considerably from school to school. In Inner-city Girls the co-ordinator provided leadership for her colleagues resulting in a strong emphasis on critical thinking in the way inquiry based cross-curricular tasks were organised. The critical contextual condition appeared to have been the expertise of two teachers, who provided the leadership that was accepted by their colleagues. The key person was the co-ordinator, a science teacher, who applied the scientific method in the form of action planning to tasks. The second key person was a teacher with responsibility for Hotel Catering and Tourism, who put an emphasis on the importance of analysis at all stages of the investigative process.

The vocabulary age norm of the Inner-city Girls group of students ranged from 17 to 10 (See section 5.4.2.). Both the teacher responsible for English and Communications and the teacher responsible for Hotel, Catering and Tourism referred to the poor quality of their spelling and grammar. The co-ordinator also referred to the students' indifferent academic performance to date.

We must realise especially in the first year of Leaving Certificate Applied that the students are very weak... they haven't performed academically up to now.

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls displayed considerable pedagogical expertise in her approach to facilitate students in thinking more critically for themselves. She appreciated the importance of getting students to think for themselves by expressing information they were extracting from books, newspapers or magazines in their own words. She stressed the need to combine teaching students specific skills didactically with facilitating them in applying the same skills in self-directed learning subsequently. She advocated a direct approach at the beginning when students were being shown the different stages of researching a particular topic.

I think that at the beginning the students have got to be directed, and a lot of time goes into direction. They have got to be shown the methods of researching information that they have got to develop.

She appreciated the need to enable students to begin to think critically at whatever stage of development they were, even if their power of conceptualisation was at a very low level. She advocated a variety of teaching strategies, including brainstorming and group work, to encourage students to incorporate their own personal opinions in the formulation of hypotheses.

Brainstorming. Get the ideas from themselves - they have them. They've gone through so many years of life that they've seen these skills among themselves every day but they don't realise it. And the way I approached it was I didn't go in and tell them how to do it. Through discussion and group discussion and brainstorming we put all our ideas on the blackboard. And I thought it was very important to take ideas from everybody in the class - even the weakest ideas - change them if we could. So that the class could see that the ideas came from them, that they had the ability to do it if they could just organise. I think once you do that - it takes a lot of time to talk about the disadvantages and the advantages of doing it one way or the other way. That takes a lot of time in the first year of the course. I think it pays off in the end.

She introduced the concept of the action plan at an early stage of the course. She introduced students to scientific method by encouraging them to formulate hypotheses and to test them in the light of available evidence. She stressed the need to introduce students gradually to information gathering outside the protective environment of the school.

I think that they have got to practise accessing sources of information... What I

did at the beginning was I asked adults into the school before they went about doing the tasks. We asked people in from the Family Planning clinic, from Alcoholics Anonymous, from various agencies around, employers, to come in and speak to us about the world of work.

She described how the teachers in Inner-city Girls used an exercise called "visitor in the classroom" as a technique for breaking down barriers between students and adults other than teachers.

We had the students coached beforehand, and we asked them to prepare questions that they wanted to ask. We vetted the questions so there wasn't anything personal in them. We sat around in a circle so that the visitor was comfortable. We had small groups. I think 15 was our biggest number in a group.

The introductory meetings with adults other than teachers were successful.

Once they saw how much these adults wanted to co-operate with us they weren't intimidated by them. They saw that the adults were very approachable people. I think that broke down their fears of going out into the community. I think it is very difficult if you let them loose onto the community without members of the community being brought in first of all into the school.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism in Inner-city Girls stressed the need for careful preparation before information gathering began.

Unless they are well prepared before they go out it won't be done very well. They need an awful lot of guidance especially in the first year of Leaving Certificate Applied as to how to gather information successfully so that it will actually be useful when they come back.

She described the emphasis she put on formative assessment from the very beginning in

order to encourage them to think more critically.

I find they need an awful lot of guidance - they almost need individual attention. They make out a questionnaire in pairs, but I would actually go through each one. I wouldn't dream of doing that later on in the course. But because it's their first one I'd make sure it's right and that they'd actually get a feel for doing a good questionnaire.

She talked about the difficulty of getting the students to look critically at the emerging questionnaire.

I actually try and make them look at it critically. I don't know if they really do. But I ask them what are you really trying to find out by asking this question. Sometimes they look at it and they say 'Oh, I don't know'. I hope it makes them think a bit.

She emphasised how the clarity of questions related directly to the quality of subsequent analysis.

If they have an understanding of the reasons they ask the questions in the first place they're good at analysing it. If they do a slapdash questionnaire where the questions are thrown together, they don't analyse them well at all. I think their analysing skills are quite low anyway, so everything they do has to be crystal clear if they're to analyse it afterwards.

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls suggested that tasks could be improved significantly if a forty-minute class were set aside each week to address skills of analysis and presentation.

They should definitely have a class maybe one per week on how to analyse findings, or how to present these findings on the computer. It would only be one 40 minute class per week. That would be invaluable for all tasks.

She also suggested that teachers should get specific training in social research techniques with a view to improving the quality of information gathered by students so that it could be made available to relevant social services.

> *I think it's very important that we should have some In-service about analysis of the questionnaires to see can we make any use of this analysis down the road. I know I'm talking about Health Education a lot but the facts and figures that they came up on unmarried mothers, deserted wives... Surely some agency could use that information?*

On my observations the expertise of the teaching team appeared to grow out of the ethos of the school that emphasised the dignity of individual students and the spirit of camaraderie that informed staff relations. The co-ordinator described how the students actively encouraged different teachers to be more connective in their approach to teaching.

> *And the kids go in to class as well - they've been so coached now about integration that they ask the other teachers "How can we integrate this, sir? Can we do this now? And could we bring that into the task?" I just think that some subjects naturally integrate. We don't just bring in the subjects just for the sake of having German stuck in the middle of a mini-company task. If it didn't apply to the subject we wouldn't integrate...*

The approach to inquiry based tasks in Market Town Coed was much less sophisticated than in Inner-city Girls. The co-ordinator presented students with a methodology based on two basic questions. Why do this? How? The principal of Market Town Coed was quite aware of the magnitude of the change for his teachers in introducing inquiry based learning.

The difficulty is not just for students but for teachers as well. Sourcing information is a difficulty. We are not in the habit of it. We tend to rely on stated facts that we deliver and that they will redeliver at exams...so it's a whole new way of thinking for teachers as well as for students and that's the main difficulty.

The teacher with responsibility for ICT described the major problem that students had in his opinion.

To pull out the relevant material that was the problem... sources were not lacking just being able to pick out the relevant stuff.

There was not any consistent approach to tasks in Market Town Coed similar to the scientific method advocated by the co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls. Each teacher appeared to have a personal approach to tasks. The principal said that the main instrument for intermodular links was ICT.

Information Technology is a part of all the tasks. Everybody will be talking to the IT teachers saying 'I want to get this done or that done' and because different people take responsibility for different tasks they know that the tasks have to be cross curricular. Both the teachers and the students will approach other teachers saying 'I would like to have some... can you suggest something'... I would often say to the art teacher 'we're doing something on the media can you think of anything from your area that would link with that'...Language teachers who often find it very difficult to relate French to something like poverty or something...we have coped through talking about it. I have more or less the same team doing it for the second year with the next group so they are already aware from their previous experience of what is necessarily involved ...a good bit of collegiality and a good bit of co-operation.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed said that many teachers had difficulty in relating tasks to modules and vice-versa.

> *Relating modules to tasks is an area of great difficulty with a lot of teachers. They find it very difficult to tie a task to a module. They will tell you that the modules are a little bit farfetched to some extent. The others will tell you if we're doing a task it's very difficult to do a module in detail.*

He believed that he had overestimated his colleagues in relation to tasks. He spelled out what he intended to do in the future.

> *I should have produced a set of overheads myself and taken them step by step, stage by stage through the task - the teachers that were going to be the cross-curricular links and the anchor person from start to finish. And I think that would be our approach from now on. We'll spend some time working through the structure of the task and setting progress dates that the students will need. Realistic ones now.*

He would expect a particular teacher to volunteer to anchor the task. All the teachers would agree a name for the task and then they would explore cross-curricular links that could be built in.

> *So we have to bring all those teachers together and explain the plan as we go through it "this is the plan for the task - here is the part you play in it, here's where you fit in". The students will be pointed out the areas that they're going to be working in, and I think their individuality will then come to the fore.*

He cited the absence of an adequate library service in the Rural Coed catchment area as a major obstacle to inquiry based tasks.

> *The library service in the nearest town to us would be quite small. There would be a waiting list - you put your name on a list if you want a particular book and*

you have to wait for it to come.

The reports of the Chief Examiner in 1996 and1997 were both extremely critical of the approach by many schools to curriculum integration. One of the constraining conditions appears to have been the vagueness regarding criteria (See Section 4.2.3. above) as exemplified by the Chief Examiner's own report.

> *Curriculum integration is a key principle in the Leaving Certificate Applied and has special relevance for Student Tasks and their assessment. While care should be taken that the task integrates as many areas as possible from within each element of the programme, the integration achieved should be relevant and appropriate not superficial and contrived* (Chief Examiner 1996:14).

The vagueness of the assessment criteria in relation to integration was a serious obstacle to the facilitation of young people to think more critically. The indications that a majority of teachers nationally take a superficial view of integration might be attributed to the fact that there is lack of clarity as to what is to be assessed and the place of specific competencies in the assessment (Bernstein1975:106-108) (see Section 4.5.5. above). Sheila O'Driscoll, a member of Leaving Certificate Applied Suport Service since its inception in 1995 and joint manager since August 1999, estimated that in 1999 approximately 25% to 30% (maximum) of teachers involved in Leaving Certificate Applied throughout the country took integration seriously. She described the difficulties she had experienced in dealing with the concept of integration at in-career development workshops. Teachers appeared to have difficulty in moving away from the strong classification of a subject centred curriculum.

> *They had a 'why bother' attitude. What do we need that for? There was a very strong feeling of 'This is my task and therefore I'll take responsibility for it'. If*

the marking scheme requires that we bring in learning from other courses then I'll bring it in, but in my own way (interview 18 August 1999).

She said that the 10% of marks for integration were not helpful.

But I think the assessment isn't helping it because they say 'Oh, 10%. They say if I put in a word of Irish there. Even though I 'm not a maths teacher, if I can put in a costing that will be maths. If they do use IT in the report that will be the IT part. They don't see it as being of any great importance. They would see any other aspect of the whole process as being much more important (ibid.).

5.5.9. Teachers' Attitudes to Collaborative Tasks

Teachers had different attitudes to collaborative work. The majority was less than enthusiastic, while students in general appeared to enjoy them. Collaborative tasks in Leaving Certificate Applied involved groups ranging from pairs to groups with more than 20 members.

Small groups appeared to have been made up of two or three members usually. In Market Town Coed, Angela and Peter collaborated on a task about Amnesty International; Ned, Mark and another boy completed a task on Travellers; Matthew worked with two others on a task about the work of non-governmental agencies in the Third World.

Peter described how Angela and himself worked together.

The two of us are doing it together. She does some of the written work, I mean posting away. If there is a phone call to be made, we make sure that the two of us are there. Whatever we decide to do in the project we always sit down and talk about it and then we come to a conclusion as to what we are going to do... Sometimes we have rows and disagreements about things like not much work

being done or being lazy. The other day she was giving out that she was doing enough and that sort of thing...

Ned described how he worked with his companions on their task about Travellers.

We're doing it as a group task so we are all giving one another a helping hand. I used to read newspapers and mark out the most important pieces and my friends would write them out. There was plenty to keep the three of us busy---- we have 14 pages of information.

Matthew explained that the teacher had presented his group task to himself and his two companions as three related individual assignments that they had to share.

You see, there's three in a group...one is doing about Brazil...one is doing about women in the Third World... and I am doing Trocaire...I was able to choose that myself ...the teacher put us into the group beforehand... and gave us three topics and it was a matter for ourselves to share them out between ourselves.

Flo said that she had teamed up with another girl to investigate how Travellers lived. She appeared to be the leader.

I said I'd love to see what it would be like to be one, that was really to see what they were like.

In Inner-city Girls they appeared to work in pairs on group tasks. Eithne joined with another girl on a task about teenage pregnancies.

I worked in collaboration with another girl. We visited CURA and the Family Planning Clinic...

Debbie described how she shared the work with her friend in their investigation of schools where the working language was Irish.

To-morrow we're going to phone to find out what day would be good for us to visit... I did the letter for the primary schools and my friend P---- did the letter

for the secondary school. We take turns as to who will do the work. One of us did up a questionnaire for the secondary school and one of us did the questionnaire for the primary schools...

Monica described how she and her friend collaborated on the task about drugs.

We had to pick an issue ... There's two of us doing it...I'm doing the part where it is written up in the papers, clippings from the paper about drugs, what the guards are saying ...I got most of the information from the guards. The girl I'm doing it with she's doing it on the side-effects of drugs...We are kind of doing it in half. When her side is finished and my side is finished, we'll put the two in together. We'll make a survey then at the end.

Deirdre explained why she liked group tasks.

It brings girls closer together than in other classes for we have to do some tasks together and we get the work done together. When we go to a factory two of us go together sometimes so you don't feel lost.

Eithne did not see any difference between doing a task on her own or in collaboration with another.

It's the same because you have to do your own background information yourself.

The majority of the teachers in Inner-city Girls appeared to have been less enthusiastic about collaborative tasks than the students. The teacher of English and Communications flatly contradicted what Deirdre said as she talked of the friction that collaborative tasks caused.

We found that there seemed to be friction with them when they shared tasks. And I found the same when I did projects with them myself for English and Communications. You might have somebody who doesn't pull her weight or is

often absent and she has the material they're working on together at home. And then the person at school is frustrated and vice versa. And I think without exception they said that they prefer to work alone so I don't make them work in pairs.

The teacher of German said that she had organised for students to work in pairs when they did tasks that were anchored in the German modules. However in future she planned to get them to work on individual tasks.

Looking back however if I were to do it again definitely I would have individual tasks even if 2 people were taking the same topic because I feel it's easier to mark. For me as well it's easier. It's very hard to know exactly who's doing the work. Somebody might be carrying somebody else et cetera. Then you come in one day and "Oh, Milly isn't in today and she has my stuff" and that kind of thing ...

The co-ordinator admitted that she had "steered away from group tasks as much as she could". While the mini-enterprise was a group effort she saw it more as a series of linked individual tasks.

Even though the end result was a group task, making these frames and selling them, each of them was given a different job, general manager, purchasing manager, personnel manager and so on. That's the way I got over the group task. So I haven't had any experience of doing a group task.

The teacher of Hotel, Catering and Tourism was the only teacher interviewed from Inner-city Girls who regarded collaborative tasks in a positive light.

The principal of Market Town Coed said that they were not putting enough emphasis on collaborative work.

Not enough. Very definitely not enough. I tend to try in terms of the course

work. Yes we would have a group discussion in groups getting together to discuss an item. On the tasks I try to get them to be more individual. I know the option is there for group tasks. A few have taken them not particularly in my module but I tend to do the module more together. They do the module individually and they do the discussion in class.

The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed had deliberately tried to put the students into small groups, but it had been difficult.

Some found working with others very difficult. It was this year before they managed. It involved the very strong people in the class carrying the weaker ones.

The Technology teacher at Market Town Coed believed that the quality of work deteriorated when students engaged in collaborative work.

The bulk of them work individually. Any of the tasks that we worked together on, the quality of it was not great at the end because none of them accepted responsibility for their piece. It was sort of we'll get it together and see what happens. There was nobody responsible for the overall project and therefore they did not put the same effort into getting the finish right.

Difficulties regarding the assessment of group tasks had a particularly inhibiting effect on the involvement of Market Town Coed teachers in collaborative work. In particular, the assessment of Angela and Peter's task on Amnesty International caused considerable distress to the students and confusion to the teachers. Angela and Peter had collaborated in writing a common final report on their joint task without indicating their individual contributions. The assessor was unable to identify their individual contributions. Angela was recalled once by the assessor and Peter was recalled twice. Angela did not appear to be unduly perturbed but Peter was quite upset.

I was brought into the room three times. She asked me about the last thing we were doing together ... and she called us back in ...because we were supposed to put down 'I did that' but the two of us whenever we went downtown to the library it was together ... but we had to write down 'I did this'. It was terrible. I went in the last class on Monday evening ... then she called me first thing on Tuesday morning and then after that as well ... Angela was called in twice.

The teachers were both confused and angry. The co-ordinator appeared to feel that the assessment was running counter to her efforts to promote collaborative work under difficult conditions.

The task promotes the student's ability to act as part of a team but when it comes to the assessment you are on your own!

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel Catering and Tourism at Market Town Coed was very angry. She had been extremely pleased with the amount of progress that the two students had made.

Both were very proud of what they had done. They had worked together ... but then they wanted to present the whole thing as one project but they wanted to have their own copy. They were very particular about that. They had done it together but they each wanted a copy of this final report.

She was very unhappy that the boy had been interviewed by the assessor on three different occasions.

The boy has a stutter. I felt he has come on in leaps and bounds in the two years since he started Leaving Certificate Applied and his self-confidence, I felt, would have been undermined totally if it was not for the fact that we reassured him. We also reassured the girl who has blossomed from a girl, who was almost ineducatable, to a student who is very competent now and is thinking of

something in Third Level from the Hotel and Catering module. We saw how these people were undermined from this Gestapo type approach to assessment. I felt very annoyed about it. I felt they were unfairly treated.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls, who had acted as external assessor on two occasions, explained the difficulty from an assessor's viewpoint.

Teacher: *In my experience as an examiner, I have seen examples where group tasks did create difficulties.*

Ó Donnabháin: *So as an examiner you've seen problems?*

Teacher: *I have seen problems with group tasks, yes.*

Ó Donnabháin: *And, what are the problems, and how can they be dealt* with?

Teacher: *The main problem is the lack of a well-defined role for each student. That is a big problem. I have been out twice examining tasks and I've written it in my report each time. The second time I was out, I thought that it would have improved. It was stated in the examiner's report that was sent out to every school - that this was where a lot of group tasks had fallen down in actual fact.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Was there any improvement in the second round?*

Teacher: *No! There was not. If anything possibly it was worse.*

She explained how she got over the difficulties in her own class.

... I'd be well aware myself from the beginning of each task that every student must be able to stand up and tell me what their job is. The first thing they would do is identify their own role within the group task. And then we do general aims. Then I get them to do 'my own aims'. I don't help them with that because once they know what their role is they should know what they're aiming to do. Then

they should know what their plan of action should be.

Her emphasis on self-evaluation also ensured that individual students had reflected on their own contribution to the task in question before meeting the external assessor. The Chief Examiner's report indicated that there were widespread problems regarding the assessment of group tasks.

> *The failure of many group tasks to address the area of individual candidate contribution persisted as something of a problem. In certain instances candidates did not document fully their own contribution to such tasks. It was also noted by examiners that candidates involved in group tasks sometimes presented a single written group report on the task but neglected to present a separate individual candidate report as required. In the case of some group tasks, examiners had genuine difficulty in identifying individual candidate contribution and involvement* (Chief Examiner 1997:14).

There did not appear to be any small group tasks in Rural Coed, but they had a very ambitious large group task in the form of building a rockery in front of the school in which they placed a seat. The task was anchored in Agriculture and Horticulture. The teacher explained:

> *I decided on it because I picked the modules that we were going to do. I picked Forestry, Garden Design, Garden Maintenance and Plant Propagation. The reason I did that was that we had forestry in the grounds - quite a bit of the grounds are planted both in coniferous and deciduous forest and it lent itself to that module. I was interested in Garden Design myself - I thought it would enhance the appearance of the school. No real landscaping had been done on the grounds apart from trees being sown there 20 years ago. The school is*

hidden away. Architecturally it's not a very desirable building and it's great that it's hidden away. But we enhanced the appearance of the place as you approach the school and I think that next year and the year after we'll enhance it more because we have ambitious projects or tasks in mind, like maybe a water feature and some trees and shrubs adjacent to the rockery.

He also felt that Garden Design could have a long-term influence on the students.

Some of those people are going to live in the area and they're going to have gardens. I think it gave them some ideas on that as opposed to just having a bit of grass and keeping it. It gave them some concept of variation and what you can have in a garden.

He stressed the demanding physical nature of the work involved and the enthusiastic reaction of students generally.

It demanded a lot of physical work. We used the tractor in the school driven by the caretaker. The transport box was used to transport the rocks, because some of them were nearly a ton weight. There's some very big rocks in the rockery, and so you needed machinery and help in that area. But getting the rocks there and placing them was a major task and the students were very enthusiastic about that. And I think they saw that it was turning out well and they were very proud of it.

The students' comments were generally quite positive. Fonsie said that they all had been doing the same thing sowing the plants and moving clay.

Percy described his part in the task.

I was levelling clay and making a lawn there on the lower part where the grass is. I set grass seed... and then I was making the garden bench.

He preferred it to the other tasks because it was "more practical ... more

straightforward".

Nora purchased the plants for the rockery.

I went to the garden centre nearby. I got loads of flowers that would be suitable to plant there. I went and I asked what would be suitable to set in a rockery. The man told me names. We have a book as well and I looked at that. Mr. Xxxxxx was happy enough with what I got.

Aidan was very positive about the work he had done in the rockery.

It's coming along grand, he said.

He showed particular interest in the contribution of the Art department to the design of the garden.

We drew up our own garden design. It linked with art as well. The Art teacher has her own garden designs ...so I drew up my own one ... I'll put it into the folders so that it will be examined too... We all drew up our own design and we came up then with the design you see out there in front of the school now...

Nora was enthusiastic about the Art dimension of the task also.

In Art as well we did the design for the rockery...the pots... they are going to be on display in the school...we are going to put a load of different pots in which we can put different flowers ...and paint the pots...

Billy was much more interested in the fabrication of the garden seat than in the horticultural work.

I'm not too interested in the garden at all... so I didn't have much time for that.

He described how they had applied skills that they had previously learned in Engineering in making the different parts of the seat.

We had done a bit of welding before. That helped us to make the seat. We had made scrolls before. They will be under the arm piece of the seat. We have

most of that stuff done before. So it's only cutting and shaping and things like that.

Tony described the difficulty they had in assembling the seat.

We got it done eventually ...it took a while to get it levelled up properly When you are welding it has to be perfectly level... we had to break it a few times. It took four people to hold one end of it... another two to hold the other end and one person to weld it. It took a while to get that done. Once we got the four legs level and the two bars going across, we were right then. It was not so bad after that...

I can confirm that I sat on the seat while I observed the rockery. Both the rockery and the seat appeared very impressive to my inexpert eye, but there was not any evidence of the painted pots or any other artwork mentioned by Nora. Reference has already been made to the dispute that erupted between the Horticulture teacher and the Art teacher. The co-ordinator explained:

The work that the Art teacher had done, which I thought was absolutely superb, ended up in the Art room. It was not used for the assessment of the task, because the Horticulture teacher said "Art has nothing to do with Horticulture". He couldn't actually see that the plan of the garden, or where the art teacher had done some nice boards on stakes that you could leave sitting in the garden - "No! that had nothing to do with plants at all", he said.

It was sad that a person, who was so concerned about the aesthetics of the school and its surroundings, could not collaborate with a colleague who was particularly interested in aesthetics and was also anxious to help. Why was it possible for him to collaborate with the teacher of Engineering and not with Art? It may have been differences in personality or gender of the two people involved? Was it the strong classification

boundaries between Horticulture and Engineering that allowed two linked activities to proceed without really impinging on the other while the weaker boundaries between Horticulture and Art tended more to integration and presented more of a threat to the teacher in his secure world of horticulture?

Another related aspect of the rockery task was the difficulty that the teacher had in coping with a class of 22 students.

> *The rockery task was one of the more positive aspects of the course. The students were very enthusiastic about it and I think it turned out very well... Now, the only negative part about it was the number of students that I had - 22. Only about 1 or 2 dropped out from the beginning of the first year and so I had about 20 or 21 involved in it. Now, some of the students were great to work. They did an awful lot of the work, but while they were working it was very hard to accommodate the others. Something like 21 or 22 students building a rockery, even with the best will in the world, was impossible. A far more realistic number would be 12. And I think that a number like 12 is a realistic number when you take into account the type of students who are doing LCA. I think I'd be able to handle 12 much better - that it's a much more realistic number. I mean, when you get up into big numbers you run into difficulties.*

It appeared that he never considered the possibility of dividing the 21 students into three different groups of 7 and of allowing one group focus on horticulture, one on engineering and one on artwork. The implication of such an arrangement would mean that he would have had to move outside the form of discourse that was particular to his specialised subject. The co-ordinator at Rural Coed assigned individual tasks to students who were not working satisfactorily in group tasks.

> *The great danger here we would find is that students who are inclined to be that*

little bit lazy do not perform well if they can get someone else to perform for them. So we would look at the group of people who are doing the task. If we found there were people who weren't willing to put a sufficient amount of work into it then we would try to have an individual task rather than a group task. But we have tried both and they have gone well.

There were three types of large group tasks in Inner-city Girls i.e. the mini-enterprise anchored in Vocational Preparation modules, the computerising of school library task anchored in ICT and a variety of tasks anchored in Hotel, Catering and Tourism. Lucy described how she participated in the task on computerising the library.

All the students had to write out an action plan in their own words and type it up. There was a group plan and an individual plan prepared by myself... I did a personal report on interviews with personnel from the public library.

"We went down and got a tour of the library", said Gerri and she went on to describe the differences between the Brown system, the Dewey system and the computerised system. Eithne described how the work had been divided between the members of the class.

...We each have our own individual section of the library. I have got the Philosophy section. We just got the categories and it was just the luck of the draw that I got the Philosophy section. We have to catalogue everything ourselves... make up database and put everything in. It will be our own work. The code for Philosophy is one hundred. I go into the library and look for all the books with one hundred on them ...and I have to get the name, author, series, publisher, date for all those books and put them on the computer into a database. The database is there and I just have to fill in the slots. We didn't start cataloguing yet because we had to visit the public library and find out

about the computerised system and the manual system. We had to write our summaries up on computer. It's harder because it all has to be done on computer in the computer room. We can't do the computer work at home because we have no computers. We can do our research at home but not the computer work. We'll have to put the cataloguing aside now (Dec.1996) because of the minicompany. From next Wednesday there will be no classes for a week and a half because of the minicompany. We'll finish the cataloguing after Christmas and put it all together.

In April 1997 Eithne expressed her satisfaction with the task even though they had not succeeded in getting a computerised system operational in the school library. She believed that they had proven that their system could work.

The system will work. We found that out...We wanted to see if the system will work ...It will work but we could not actually put it together...we had not the time... someone next year could pick it up. In years to come if they want a computer in there they will know that it will work. At present, the librarian has a book in which she has all the details of each book in the library. A few weeks ago that book went missing. She did not know what books were in or out of the library. But if you have it computerised you can have a back up disk as well. So if you misplace a disk you also have the other disk. It's simpler anyhow. You just have to go into the database... you can do query search for some book... you just write in the author's name and it will come up ...what book this is and everything. So it's away simpler and faster as well....

Unfortunately the teacher, who was anchoring the task was not interviewed, so it is not clear whether she had underestimated the amount of time required to make the system operational.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls said that her modules were very appropriate for group tasks.

It's a nice way of getting everybody involved. They might be staging an event, for example, or doing a meal for their teachers and while everybody has a very individual task within it - it teaches them how to work as a team as well, and come up with an end product.

She described a group task that was anchored in both the Catering and Tourism modules.

We did a walking tour for 10 parents whom we invited through our Home School Liaison Officer. They were not the kids' own parents at all. In fact they did not know the ladies at all. Each of the girls giving the tour had two sites that they had to research and write a little speech. They took the ladies around and different students made short speeches at the various points of interest. And it didn't really knock a bother out of them at all. They were quite confident heading off. I didn't even go with them in actual fact.

When they returned another group who had stayed at school provided refreshments for the parents. That was their role so they didn't actually go on the walk. All the students loved it.

She said that the Home/School Liaison Officer reported that the parents were delighted with it also. She stressed that she did not force anyone to take any particular role as she was trying to encourage teamwork.

They find their own little talent I think within the task and they generally choose their little job. Now I try to encourage them to vary the job from year to year so they won't be maybe actually catering both years - that they might do a bit of talking one year and a bit of catering the other year. But I don't force them

because I feel they're entitled to have a choice as a member of the team.

She referred to the way in which pressure appeared to increase the team spirit during a task based on providing a meal for employers who had co-operated in providing work experience places and consultants for mini-enterprises.

We were actually under pressure because it was a buffet that we did for 60 or 70 adults who came in at night. It was actually for their employers and it was the real thing. It wasn't just for their teachers. It was for the general public and there was pressure on them. We were all under pressure. I think that the pressure really brought out the good in the students. They all pulled together. They stayed here that evening until 6 o'clock if they had to depending on their role. There was a sense of team spirit.

Catering provided the basis for group tasks in both Market Town Coed and Rural Coed. Flo (Market Town Coed) described the Christmas meal that her group had prepared for their teachers and the local bishop. Unfortunately the bishop was unable to attend.

He sent us a letter to say that he couldn't come, said Flo.

Group tasks sometimes gave teachers an opportunity of seeing their students in a different light from that of their own classroom. I had the privilege of being invited to a lunch, prepared by Rural Coed students for their teachers as a group task. The food was very tasty, the presentation was impressive and the behaviour of the headwaiter (one of the students) was very professional. I was sitting with a teacher who had been complaining to me that morning about the immaturity of Leaving Certificate Applied students compared to the other senior students. She was amazed at the professionalism displayed by the students.

The regular Leaving Certificate Students would die, if they had to do this. There is no doubt but that the Leaving Certificate Applied students are far ahead of

them in a work situation.

The less than enthusiastic attitude of a significant number of teachers in all three schools to collaborative work suggests that it might be difficult to maintain the level of group work attained during the initial years of the programme.

5.5.10. Teachers' Attitudes to Experience based Learning

While work experience placements was a form of experience based learning that happened in the three case study schools, there were contrasting approaches to it. The arrangements varied from being actively managed by the school authorities to being left very much the responsibility of the individual student. While some schools endeavoured to involve all Leaving Certificate Applied teachers in Work Experience, others left it to the teacher who made the arrangements with employers.

In Inner-city Girls the principal involved all the members of the Leaving Certificate Applied team.

Ó Donnabháin: *Do all the teachers participate in monitoring work experience?*

Principal: *They do! So it depends on the time allocation per teacher. The more time they've been allocated for teaching LCA the greater the number of students they are to monitor.*

Ó Donnabháin: *And they have to go out and visit them in the workplace?*

Principal: *In the workplace. At least twice.*

The situation was quite different in Market Town Coed and Rural Coed. A teacher in Market Town Coed said that he would like to have been involved but that he did not have the time.

Teacher: *I would like to have been involved but time does not allow that. I'm not the co-ordinator and I don't arrange the work experience. I did not see the*

reports. I would have liked to have seen the reports on work experience

Ó Donnabháin: *Did work experience make any contribution to your task?*

Teacher: *To be honest it didn't really...there would be scope for it but it didn't.... I wish it could. And it could but it didn't, not in my case.*

In Rural Coed the onus was on the students to find their own placements and monitoring was done mainly by phone. The co-ordinator described the procedures followed.

Co-ordinator: Work *experience is organised basically I would say by phone more than by actual contact. Because we had the Vocational Preparation and Training course here we would have had contact with a good many employers. We would say to the Leaving Cert Applied 1 students when they're going home in the summer time "Right you're coming on the LCA course next year. What area would you like to work in?". And the student would tell you "I want to be a carpenter", and we would say to them going home "Right, you have from now until September - you've the whole summer holidays to go around and talk to carpenters and ask them would they be interested in giving you one day a week work experience from now until Christmas. If they are interested, you take their phone number, you bring it back, you give it to me and I'll make contact with them." And I send the employers a copy of the insurance and everything else that goes with it. And Leaving Cert Applied 2 we do the exact same thing. We continue that process right until the end of the course, because we find that these children are not good at actually seeking things out for themselves, and it's amazing how they improve when they have had two or three sessions of*

work experience over. Some of them stay with one employer all of the time - they're very happy to stay with the one employer. Some of them would have had three different people.

Ó Donnabháin: *How does that happen - when they're leaving one to go to another?*

Co-ordinator:*Again, you see, they would be telling ... we would be monitoring the work experience because I've one class contact with them a week, and they would tell me "I don't like what I'm at." And I would say "Right, it's time you started thinking about where you would like to go to".*

Ó Donnabháin: *Do you visit the workplaces at all?*

Co-ordinator:*In so far as I possibly can, but I don't have sufficient time to do that, because I'm trying to co-ordinate this and the two courses in a very short period of time.*

Ó Donnabháin: *How much time is allocated to you for your work as co-ordinator?*

Co-ordinator: *Two hours per week.*

The Market Town Coed co-ordinator explained that the first work experience placement was presented as a task to the external assessor. Other placements were not. She said they followed the same routine for all placements.

Yes, they follow the same routine ...they follow the same routine for work experience.

Students said that they did not do written reports on any placements other than tasks.

Teachers in Rural Coed appeared to be detached from work experience. For example, the teacher of Agriculture/Horticulture from Rural Coed did not feel that he had anything to do with work experience.

Ó Donnabháin: *What involvement have you with work experience?*

Teacher: *From my point of view I don't know anything about that - I wasn't involved in that area at all. I wouldn't be able to make any comment on it at I wouldn't be able to make any comment on it at all.*

Ó Donnabháin: *But they go out every week.*

Teacher: *They do. I know that but I have no input in that area at all.*

Ó Donnabháin: *And they seem to love that.*

Teacher: *Yes!*

Table 8 provides a comparative summary of arrangements for the implementation of work experience placements in Market Town Coed, Inner-city Girls and Rural Coed.

Table 8: **Arrangements for implementation of Leaving Certificate Applied work experience placements in three schools.**

Work Experience	*Market Town Coed*	*Inner-city Girls*	*Rural Coed*
Form of Placement	1x5day block + 7 consecutive Fridays	2x5day blocks each year	Every Wednesday throughout year
Contacting employers	Employers contacted by school beforehand. Students then approached employers.	Preparatory visits by teachers to workplaces. Students were given a choice of possible places.	The onus was on students to find their own workplaces.
Monitoring	Ongoing contacts with employers as general school policy.	Regular monitoring of students by visits to workplaces by volunteer teachers. Minimum 2 visits per student	Co-ordinator visited as many workplaces as he could. Contact maintained by co-ordinator by phone.
Planning	Minimal planning. Reports recorded on sheets provided by teachers.	Formal planning sessions in class before going on placement. Students recorded daily reports in special journal.	Minimal planning. Confined to organisational matters.

Table 8: (continued) Arrangements for implementation of Leaving Certificate Applied work experience placements in three schools.

Work Experience	*Market Town Coed*	*Inner-city Girls*	*Rural Coed*
Debriefing	No formal debriefing.	Formal debriefing in class after placement ends.	Debriefing in form of frank class discussion for 40 minutes each Tuesday.
Written Report	Only in case of student task.	Written report in form of answers to common questions set by teachers.	Only in case of student task.

In Market Town Coed there appeared to be minimal planning and debriefing in relation to work experience. Students only prepared written reports on placements that they were presenting as tasks for external assessment. Some students perceived work experience placements as an effective way of making contact with potential employers.

Angela (Market Town Coed) had been on three different placements: a horse racing stable, a catering establishment and a supermarket. Three girls in the class, who liked horses, had gone to the stable for seven consecutive Fridays. The other two girls in the class had gone to what Angela described as "sweet shops".

We went there every Friday for seven weeks. We were learning stable management. We learned how to clean the horses, feed them, bring them out for

walks, exercise them... The work was hard as well. We had to bring them in and out, give them water and we did that in the snow and everything...

The amount of planning appeared to have been minimal. It appeared to have been confined to organisational matters.

Ó Donnabháin: *How did you prepare for the work experience placement in the racing stable?*

Angela: *How we got out?*

Ó Donnabháin: *Before you went out... what preparatory work did you do?*

Angela: *A teacher organised it. He knew the three girls who went liked horses. He asked a girl in the class to organise it. She knew the woman in the stable and she got her to organise it.*

Angela felt that the work she did in all three workplaces was "like real work".

In the supermarket you did what everybody else was doing ...stocking shelves and packing bags and all that...

Angela completed a written report on her placement in the racing stable as part of a task for which she attained three credits. She did not do written reports on the other two placements.

I didn't have to... I didn't do a task on them.

Instead of the students writing a report on the placement, the principal appeared to have an arrangement with employers to get individual reports that students were not allowed to see.

Ó Donnabháin: *Did you write any report on the other two work experience placements?*

Angela: *I didn't have to. We got these sheets going out to see how good we*

were. We had to bring them back to the teacher.

Ó Donnabháin: *What sort of reports did you get?*

Angela: *We were not allowed look at it.*

Debriefing in Market Town Coed in relation to work experience placements appeared to be both informal and superficial.

We were talking all about it... what I did out there and how I enjoyed it and about horses and stable management, said Angela.

Mark (Market Town Coed) had been on three placements, one in a factory and two in an electrical firm. His teachers did not want him to go back to the same place but he was hoping to get an apprenticeship there.

The teachers wanted me to go somewhere different but I'm pretty sure that is what I want to do. They did not want me to go to the same place twice. I hope to get an apprenticeship there. I asked about apprenticeships and they told me to come back in May and they'd tell me definitely then.

Mark had only done a written report on the placement in the factory that he had presented as a task.

In Inner-city Girls teachers made preparatory visits to workplaces before they were deemed to be suitable for placements. Students were invited to choose places that were of particular interest to them. Students were discouraged from concentrating on any one particular type of workplace.

All Leaving Certificate Applied teachers volunteered to monitor students while on work experience. Students were visited on at least two occasions. Formal planning sessions were conducted in class with the assistance of specially designed work experience journals before students went on site. Formal debriefing in the form of discussion supplemented by written assignments concluded each placement.

Lucy (Inner-city Girls) used the work experience placements to investigate possible future careers.

> *I felt I had two choices of what I would do after school - child minding or computers. Now I know. Now I feel that child minding would be better for me. I went to a creche on work experience. I was not allowed to go to any other creche. I had to try other workplaces.*

As part of her preparation for a career in child minding the Guidance counsellor arranged for her to take a six-week evening course that dealt with children's rights and child minders' rights as well as an introduction to First Aid. Lucy also joined the FCA (voluntary army reserves) so that she could get further training in First Aid.

Joan (Inner-city Girls) talked about the difficulty she had to get a placement in an Internet café, as she had already completed a placement in a hi-tech location and her teachers wanted her to have greater variety in her placements. She succeeded in negotiating with her teachers to allow her to go to the Internet café.

Mandy's description of the debriefing as it happened in Inner-city Girls does not show much evidence of critical analysis.

> *We had to write a report on each work experience. When we went back to school to our classes we all talked about our work placements and we'd say how we got on.*

Debbie's description of the written report also indicated that the debriefing was set in a generalised frame based on what teachers imagined the experiences of students to be rather than on what individuals had actually experienced.

> *We just had to write up on it. We had a number of questions the class teacher gave us. It was more like an assignment than a task.*

In Rural Coed students went on work experience on every Wednesday throughout the

year. The onus was on students to find their own workplaces. The co-ordinator visited as many workplaces as he could, but he did not visit all of them in any one year. Planning was confined to organisational matters. Debriefing took the form of a weekly frank class discussion with the co-ordinator, who had worked in industry at an earlier stage of his career. Written reports were only done when a placement was being presented as a task to an external assessor.

Aidan went on work experience to a farm.

> *It's on a farm. He has horses and cattle and sheep. I go there on Wednesday and I work there at weekends as well. It was not a great change for me as I live on a farm. We have horses ourselves.I would not have that much experience of cattle and sheep. I am learning more about looking after cattle than I would have known ... cows calving and everything else and the suckling end of it.*

Nora was very positive about work experience. "Work experience is great", she said. She described how she went on work experience to a playschool every Wednesday and was employed in the same place at weekends. Nora attempted to clarify the difference between what she did on work experience and what she did on paid employment.

> *On work experience she lets me there with all the kids. I can look after them all. I am not supposed to get paid on work experience. No, that's not the only difference. There are different things I do on a Wednesday that I do not do on a Saturday. She is not supposed to pay me for the work experience so she gives me different things to do...*

Billy wanted to be a carpenter. He had been on work experience with two employers. In the first case he was doing outdoor work. In the second he was working indoors. He worked from 8.00a.m. until 6.00p.m. each Wednesday. He also worked for the same employer on Saturdays. He was paid for Saturday's work but not for Wednesday as

that was regarded as work experience placement. Billy did not seem to see any difference between the work he did on the two days. He hinted that the employer was giving him an increasing amount of work.

I'm getting on too well with him ...oh he has me doing a lot of stuff for him.

While there were major differences between the approaches to work experience in the three case study schools, one common weakness was the emphasis on the concrete experience and the neglect of the other three key elements of experiential learning, reflective observation, abstract rationalisation and active experimentation. Sheila O Driscoll, the joint manager of Leaving Certificate Applied, expressed her concern to me about the small number of cross-curricular tasks that were based on work experience placements. She felt that it reflected teachers' general attitude to experience based learning as being in some way inferior to theoretical learning.

A survey conducted by me in Spring 1996 showed that approximately 60% of Leaving Certificate Applied students in Market Town Coed and Inner-city Girls were in paid employment. Furthermore it appeared to have been accepted practice in Rural Coed that students who were on work experience placement on Wednesdays were employed by the same employer at weekends. Ned (Market Town Coed) informed me that he worked every day for farmers. At certain times of the year such work interfered with students' attendance at school. In May 1997 the teacher of Technology at Market Town Coed explained.

A lot of them are out at the moment- they are supposed to be here but they're cutting silage ... they are not actually farmers in their own right. They are working for someone who will pay them to do a day's work...

He said that one student was working for extraordinarily long hours.

One of them who should be here has been cutting silage from 4 o'clock this morning and will be at it until 12 o'clock to-night.

The principal of Inner-city Girls also talked about the number of her Leaving Certificate Applied students who were in part-time employment.

Quite a number of our students in LCA are employed on a part-time basis. And they are well able to carry their part-time jobs and do their work at school also. And I think the part-time work might be a help to them... And they're very serious about the job. Of course the bit of money at the end of the day is always very enticing for them.

Eithne (Inner-city Girls) worked in a canteen attached to a factory.

At the moment I do 6 hours during the week in Xxxx factory i.e. two hours on each of three evenings and then 10 hours on Friday and Sat. nights in the restaurant...

Gerri (Inner-city Girls) combined work in her own home with paid employment.

I get up at 7.30. I have to get my brother and sister up. My sister is thirteen and my brother is eight.... two big babies . I have to make my mother's breakfast in the mornings. I have to do some work before I leave for school because I have work after school. I'm a waitress in a café from 4 to 6...the waitressing job is ok but I don't want to stay there because the wages are bad.

Mandy worked at week-ends.

I work already in a restaurant... It's just weekends at the moment...16 hours... 8 on Sat and 8 on Sunday ... I get on very well with the staff...

By May 1998 the position had deteriorated to the point that the teachers in Inner-city Girls felt that the students were "fitting their schooling around their jobs". There is no indication that teachers in any of the case study schools used students' experiences in

paid employment as opportunities for learning about the world of work.

The approach to mini-enterprises in Inner-city Girls appear to put a greater emphasis on reflective observation and active experimentation than the approach to work experience placement. Two mini-enterprises were organised in Inner-city Girls but there were not any in either Market Town Coed or Rural Coed. Eight consecutive schooldays were set aside for the production phase of the mini-enterprise activity after the preparatory phase had been completed. The preparatory phase involved raising of capital by selling shares, deciding on a product or service, and appointing officers. One mini-enterprise produced padded picture frames and the other produced Christmas wreaths.

Minienterprises gave students in Inner-city Girls an opportunity to role-play the different stages of applying for a job. Eithne said, officers were selected by two people from a local company. There appeared to have been different interviewers for different positions. Eithne was interviewed for the position of general manager by a panel of two people. Gerri was interviewed by a finance manager of a local company for a position of finance manager. Joan was interviewed for a second position of finance manager by people from outside the school. Debbie was interviewed for a position of sales manager by a man from a neighbouring town. Monica also applied for the position of sales manager against strong opposition.

Four other girls and myself applied for the job of sales manager.

Monica was appointed sales manager of the Christmas Wreath Company with Debbie as her assistant. Lucy was interviewed for the position of advertising manager "by two people from outside the school". All students who wished to apply for a position as an officer in one of the mini-enterprises were required to submit written applications

beforehand. There was not any compulsion on students to apply.

Nobody made me do it, said Joan.

The students were given role models in the persons of the interviewers, who promised the successful candidates that they would be available to act as consultants during the life of the mini-enterprise. Eithne was very appreciative.

They said that if we needed any more help or any more information they'd help us out. They were very good to us. They gave us a rundown on how to run a business and ideas.

Gerri had applied for the position of financial manager as she aspired to a career as an accountant.

I want to find out what a financial manager has to do.

She was also impressed at the manner in which the woman who had selected her as financial manager of one of the mini-enterprises then went on to give her a balanced view of the position.

She was telling me what finance managers have to do. They are usually working on their own. People don't like finance managers for they tell them how much they can't spend. You have to look at both sides of a job...

The people who interviewed Joan for the position of financial manager of the second mini-enterprise also promised to provide her with help and advice.

Students, who were selected as officers, were given an opportunity of getting a fuller view of the role they were playing in the mini-enterprise in the real world of business. They were required to interview their counterparts in the real world about the particular position, other than those who were acting as consultants to them.

Eithne: *I shall have to interview a general manager from another company.*

Gerri: *I have to visit another business and try to make an appointment with the*

finance manager. I'll phone and interview them during the Christmas holidays. I'll find out some information about the company and the history of the business. I'll ask what happens when the books are short or if they make a profit how they split the profit.

Lucy: *I have to make an appointment to interview somebody in the advertising section of a company. I hope to go to a firm engaged in graphic design.*

There was not any evidence that students shared the results of interviews with different professionals with their fellow-students.

Students were using a specially designed mini-enterprise journal as they worked their way through the various stages of the task. Lucy showed me the skill audit section of her journal where she had listed what she considered to be her weaknesses and the targets she was setting herself. Eithne explained how she planned to use her action plan.

In my task I will do a report on what I did as a general manager. I shall gather information on my own performance. I have an action plan and work according to that and I'll base my report on that.

Joan found the action plan very helpful in relation to time management in the context of the tight schedule in which to get things completed.

I keep a diary of the minico on a day to day basis, said Monica.

She stressed that the mini-enterprise was run on realistic lines.

We're doing the minicompany as if we were opening our own business. It is like a real business that anyone would start up. We have to pay money to rent out the room we're using. We have to pay for electricity. We can't just start making wreaths and try to sell them. We have to have a background of orders. As the sales manager I have to take in orders. I have to go around and collect a

deposit from everyone who has placed an order.

5.5.11. Different Attitudes to Assessment

Teacher attitudes to formative assessment in Inner-city Girls differed clearly from those in the other two case study schools. Formative assessment leading to the development of student self-evaluation skills appeared to have been addressed seriously by the co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls. Self-assessment was a key element of the concept of the action plan that she introduced to the students. There was a skill audit as part of the journal students kept in relation to their mini-enterprise, where they listed their strengths and weaknesses and the targets they were setting for themselves in relation to specific skills. The teacher of German at Inner-city Girls was impressed by the quality of the students' self-assessment. She believed that there must have been a great emphasis on it during the first task they had done.

They're quite good at self-assessment. I'd say the person who did the first task with the group must have put a lot into it. They were quite good and well able to be objective and say "Well, I could have done more here. I felt if I could have had more time I could have..." They were quite critical of themselves.

When she engaged in formative evaluation with the students, she found that they had already done their self-assessment.

I read through them and went through them with them but they had them done themselves first. They were able to stand back and to look and say how the tasks could be improved.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls described how she facilitated students to carry out self-assessment.

Teacher: *Through the task they get very good at it. That's a fairly high-level*

skill - actually evaluating yourself honestly and critically, you know. They do get very good at it...

Ó Donnabháin: *How do you help them to learn to evaluate themselves?*

Teacher: *I find it very handy to get them to ask themselves questions like "if I was going to do this again could I improve anything about it even if it was good? Could I improve anything about it or just even would I change anything. It could be brilliant but would I do it differently the next time anyway?" Things like that. I made out an evaluation sheet for them specifically aimed at cookery but it encourages them under headings to evaluate their performance. They're well able to do it. Even on a blank sheet they're well able to evaluate themselves by the time they come to the second year of Leaving Certificate Applied* (Interview May 1997).

The teachers in Market Town Coed were rather diffident about self-assessment. The principal talked about his own problems with self-assessment.

Maybe it is an Irish cultural thing more than an educational thing. I certainly find it difficult to evaluate myself and my work. I either go to one extreme or the other ...I find it very difficult to find the merits and demerits of something that I have done. Again I think that the students go to the opposite poles. You know XXXXX. Now he's wonderful in his own self-evaluation and woe betide anyone who criticises him. There are others ... When the credits come back for their tasks it's at that stage that you get their evaluation vis-a-vis what they got. You get the two opposite extremes. I suppose that is the closest that I have come to self-assessment (Interview May 1997).

The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed described how she attempted to facilitate

students in self-evaluation.

Ó Donnabháin: *Do they find it more difficult to find the good points than the bad points?*

Co-ordinator: *They don't like to do that...they don't like to criticise their own work.*

Ó Donnabháin: *How do you encourage them to do that?*

Co-ordinator: *With difficulty really because it is not something that I'm particularly good at myself... I try to get them to imagine it is somebody else's work and how would you evaluate it... Then I ask them to try to remember back when they were doing the task and what they enjoyed and what they felt they could have done better...It's not an area that I would be strong on...*

The ICT teacher at Market Town Coed stressed the need for sensitivity in dealing with self-assessment.

For a weak student that is a problem. It is a problem to ask them to look at their own work and to ask them to criticise it after spending so much time on it. I found that a hard one all right. When you have to say what improvements would you make on that? what modifications would you make?...especially to a weak student it's a bit of a knocker. You just have to be careful with that one. I find that difficult....

The teacher with responsibility for Construction/Manufacturing at Market Town Coed had a very clear-cut approach to self-assessment.

They have to ask themselves one basic question. If I was doing this task again what would I do differently. That covers it.

The teacher with responsibility for Technology was worried about the low self-esteem of the students.

Self-assessment may be a bit fictional to say the least of it. Some of them have a very poor self-image... they are much better than they sign themselves in at...You know I never made anything in my life and I'm not going to start now sort of thing...there is no way forward from here. That is one of the big problems. They put themselves down, rather than looking at it in an objective way. If you talk to them afterwards they'll say, 'oh, I never made anything '. When you say to them 'what about that ?'...they'd say 'I wasn't happy with it'...(Interview May 1997).

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed was definitely opposed to self-assessment.

Ó Donnabháin: *Do you encourage the students to do self-evaluation of their tasks?*

Co-ordinator,Rural Coed: *The point I would make about this, Diarmaid, and while it may sound ridiculous it is factual, every child that does a task regardless of how good or how bad the task is will tell you it's a great task. And I would often ask "Why do you say it's great?" - "Jaysus sir, I worked fierce hard on that!". That's the way they evaluate their work. And you know if you say to them - I remember saying to one child "I think that could improve" and the bottom fell out of his world. It just fell apart. I think that on the tasks the students produce the best they are capable of doing. Now, you do get the odd dosser who doesn't do it, and you know yourself when you look at the task and you know the background of the student you know that no work has gone into it. When you see a child there who has worked their butt off and OK by normal standards the folder presented mightn't be of the top standard but you do know that it's the best that that poor devil can produce.*

Ó Donnabháin: *And what about if the question were asked of the student "If*

you were to do it again what would you do differently?"

Co-ordinator: *The only answer you will get to that question is "I wouldn't spend as much time on it".*

Ó Donnabháin: *Do you think it's a fair question to put to the students?*

Co-ordinator: *I don't think it's a fair question to put to students particularly during the assessment of the task. I think the task that's presented in front of the examiner is the best work. I'm not quite sure how it should be approached but I think that you should listen to students talking who have been in with the external assessor. They'll say to you, 'He asked me how would I improve it - sure I couldn't improve it!'" This is the part that is demoralising for the children. Now, OK you can say we're bending over backwards towards the kids, but I think you can never allow their morale to go down. It must be kept up as high as you possibly can.*

In 1996 the Report of Leaving Certificate Applied Chief Examining Group adverted to difficulty nationally in relation to self-evaluation.

> *Candidates also experienced some difficulty in the area of self-evaluation. In a number of instances candidates appraised the completed task or research results rather than evaluated the quality of their own performance in completing the task. Some equated self-evaluation exclusively with negative self-criticism* (Chief Examiner 1996:11).

The provision of the summative assessment of tasks as part of a national system of certification helped to alleviate the scepticism among teachers and students about the level of commitment nationally to Leaving Certificate Applied. Unfortunately an industrial relations dispute in the Examinations Section of the Department of Education

and Science forced the postponement of the assessments from February to April in 1997. I heard many teachers expressing the view at meetings around the country that a work-to-rule by civil servants would not be allowed to interfere with the traditional examinations. The Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Market Town Coed described the impact of the postponement on her students. She claimed that the postponement had significantly demotivated her students.

> *They did not have a sense of purpose. They could not see that this was something beyond all our control. I think it was one of the reasons for a lack of purpose in that group.*

Eithne, a student at Inner-city Girls, felt that her work was disrupted.

> *It was very annoying. We just had the three tasks over and we thought that's them over now ... Then we heard about the strike and we didn't know what was happening... By the time the exam came we had forgotten half of what we had done in the tasks.*

Mark (Market Town Coed) complained that the video his group had made as part of their task had been mislaid during the period of the postponement. The provision of the postponed assessments in April followed by a scheduled series of assessments in May appeared to have restored confidence very quickly.

The principal of Market Town Coed described how the positive attitude displayed by the majority of assessors was a boost for the morale of Leaving Certificate Applied students.

> *They actually amaze themselves with the quality of their productions. What really is amazing after the first assessment and the assessors may tell them 'that is a very good task or that is a very nice task'. It really does give them a sense of self-confidence and the number of students that will come up to me and ask*

me to have a look at their task. That speaks for itself. Nobody comes up to you and says 'have a look at my homework'.

The principal of Inner-city Girls agreed.

The examiners that came in were excellent and very conscientious, bar one, which is one out of a huge number. The examiners have come in. They meet all the students. They've tried to put them at ease - they're very nice with them, and the girls feel so much at ease going in for their exams.

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed was extremely impressed by the way the assessors helped to boost the students' self-confidence.

I think myself the task has been a great confidence-builder. The fact that a student does work, is allowed to present it to an external examiner, is interviewed and comes out well out of it because all the examiners - I will give them credit for that - have never actually floored a student no matter how bad their task was.

Mandy (Inner-city Girls) was extremely pleased with the assessor she had.

The assessment was brilliant. I got on very well. I was able to answer the questions...the examiner was grand.... she was very nice...

Joan (Inner-city Girls) was also very pleased as the assessors asked her many questions about a task in which she, herself, had taken a great interest.

Nora (Rural Coed) was also positive about the assessments.

...it's a good idea having those tests every six months.

A teacher of Construction and Manufacturing at Rural Coed believed that external assessment had boosted students' self-confidence generally.

It has increased the self-confidence because they have gone in and been able to explain their case to an external examiner. Generally they have got a

favourable response from external examiners and that is bound to have increased confidence.

He said that he was aware of only one case where the external assessment had been a negative experience for a student.

An instance where one was brought in to be interviewed three times on the one task...I don't think that does anything for a student's confidence... it is very negative and not fair on the student involved where the whole point of the course is to build selfconfidence....it's the only incident that I know of.....

He was referring to the bad experience Angela and Peter (Market Town Coed) had with an assessor due to a lack of awareness on the part of their teachers of the procedures regarding the presentation of individual reports on group tasks (See Section 5.5.9). Both Mark (Market Town Coed) and Eithne (Inner-city Girls) were unhappy because the assessor did not devote sufficient time for them to present their work properly. Eithne explained that she had been involved in a group task aimed at computerising the school library.

We did not really get enough time inside with her. She was supposed to get into our databases ... I was only in there about two minutes while some of the girls were in there for twenty minutes in the database . I was nearly last on the list. I think it was time....she was holding back time. So I did not think that was fair ...After preparing for the work for the whole time and then the strike this had to happen as well. It was about computerising the library and she gave me about two or three minutes. She just asked was there anything different on my computer disk.... had I anything else beside the database.....So I did not get a chance to show her my database.

Mark (Market Town Coed) was unhappy about the lack of interest shown by the

assessor in his task on Travellers.

> *I went in and I was looking forward to it ...you know all the work I did ...they say it's only ten hours work ... I'd say we put in at least 25 hours work...but she did not examine us very good you know. I can't put my finger on it. She did not ask enough questions on it for the amount of work that went into it. She should have asked a lot more questions. She could have asked more about Travellers, ethnic groups ... I had learned all about their language...I even had a few words of the language. I had them all written down in the task... but she just did not ask me questions. Where do the people come from who are marking tasks? How do they get the people to mark them? Are they from schools? They should realise the amount of work that is in it ...*

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed also talked of the negative impact on the students of one unsatisfactory examiner .

> *The students felt that some of the questions were not related to the task at all. The assessment of the task that was being examined had been delayed due to an industrial dispute in the Dept. He did not allow them the opportunity to refresh their memory of the particular task by looking at the particular folder that they had in front of them. I felt that the last two or three candidates that were examined were just rushed through the door nearly because they were making a bus... but that hurt the students a lot. They felt they had worked very hard. They had produced the tasks on time. The assessments had been late through no fault of their own. And then they were just rushed through as if they didn't make any difference.*

The evidence suggests that the manner in which the assessor interacted with the student had a significant impact on the self-esteem of the individual concerned and accordingly

was either a source of motivation or demotivation.

5.5.12. Quality of School Links with Other Social Systems

Cross-curricular tasks with an out-of-school dimension depended on three main supports – parents, employers, organisations, both public service and voluntary, and members of the general public. The students' parents, who appear to have been positively disposed to the course, were not encouraged to be involved in any of the three learning environments.

In one situation all the Leaving Certificate Applied teachers interacted with a network of contacts that the school had built up over the years to provide a monitored work experience placement programme, an advisory group for mini-enterprises and volunteers from local organisations and from the general public who were willing to help students in their inquiry based learning. In a second situation the principal had established two-way links with local employers by which the school tried to gear its courses to the needs of local industry and the school facilities were made available to upskill the local workforce in Information Communications Technology. In the third situation links with the local community were left entirely to the co-ordinator, who, of his own volition, maintained personal contacts regarding work experience with employers who had been recruited by the students over an extensive rural area.

Work experience places were provided in all three situations but the extent of monitoring ranged from meticulous to casual (see 4.8.8. above). In all three students used work experience placements as a means of introducing themselves to potential long-term and short-term employers.

Experience based learning in the form of mini-enterprises was only provided in one learning environment. The involvement of people from industry in the appointment

of mini-enterprise officers provided a valuable role-play exercise on the different stages of applying for employment. The mini-enterprise officers' subsequent access to their counterparts in local industries provided them with an opportunity of gaining a better understanding of the local economy and the roles played by different individuals in it. There was not any evidence of officers being facilitated in sharing their perspectives on local business with their peers. In one learning environment an enlightened idea to do a series of profiles of successful local business people did not appear to achieve its full potential through lack of sufficient preparatory work in inquiry based learning by the teachers involved.

Students in a rural environment were at a distinct disadvantage in inquiry based learning owing to the absence of an adequate public library service. Urban female students showed a particular interest in researching social issues of particular interest to themselves in the context of their own communities.

5.6. Summary

Three kinds of conditions influenced the implementation of cross-curricular tasks in Leaving Certificate Applied, causal, intervening and contextual. The most significant causal condition was the ongoing half-yearly assessment of cross-curricular tasks as an element in the national certification of students. The on-going assessment procedures ensured that school principals and teachers brought cross-curricular work to a pivotal point in the curriculum rather than as an optional peripheral activity. The on-going assessment procedures were a source of affirmation and motivation to students.

The most significant intervening condition was the culture of schools that was not conducive to cross-curricular learning. A technically orientated school culture promoting competitive individualism has favoured instructional methods aimed at

facilitating students to amass large amounts of factual knowledge in relation to subjects with clearly defined boundaries to be regurgitated in written examinations at the end of courses. In the dominant culture in second level schools in Ireland teachers have tended to become routinised in a narrow range of didactic methodologies. Students who have not been able to compete successfully have tended to have been neglected. The symptoms of such neglect have been low literacy levels and low self-esteem.

The single most influential contextual condition was school ethos in that it affected all the others. The quality of leadership displayed not only by principals and co-ordinators but also by teachers and students reflected the particular set of values by which individual schools operated with particular reference to students in initial vocational education. The quality rather than the style of leadership displayed by principals was particularly important in supporting teachers to change from their routinised methodologies to more creative strategies. The ethos of individual schools also informed the quality of student/teacher relationships ranging from suspicious hostility to mutual trust and respect. A second important contextual condition was the level of expertise displayed by teachers. There were indications that many teachers in two case study schools felt diffident about their ability to manage inquiry based learning. In one school there were clear indications of resistance to substantive change whereas in the other there was a willingness to introduce new methodologies, but support was required in the form of in-career development. In all three schools there appeared to be a superficial view of experience based learning with the focus on concrete experiences to the exclusion of the potential learning opportunities. Different attitudes of teachers regarding assessment were also an important contextual condition. In one school formative assessment was an integral part of students' learning from cross-curricular tasks. In a second teachers conceded that they had considerable

personal difficulties in facilitating students in self-assessment. The co-ordinator in the third school strongly objected to self-assessment as he believed that it was unfair to ask students to criticise their own work. The provision of the ongoing summative assessment of cross-curricular tasks by external assessors was a source of reassurance to students and teachers regarding the commitment of the State to Leaving Certificate Applied. Problems arose in relation to the assessment of group tasks when teachers failed to follow guidelines regarding the identification of individual contributions. Some students also felt aggrieved when assessors were not able to devote sufficient attention to particular tasks due to pressures of time. However, in the great majority of cases examined the summative assessment was in itself a positive contextual condition in relation to the implementation of cross-curricular tasks. There was a considerable difference in the quality of the school/community links in the three schools. In two of them there was a well-organised network that had been carefully nurtured by the principals and the teachers over many years. In the third school there was only a loose group of employers that had been personally recruited by the students themselves as providers of work experience.

Differences in conditions had a major impact on the consequences of the sequences of action/interaction strategies that comprised cross-curricular tasks in the three case study schools. Some of those consequences, such as increased self-confidence resulting from the affirmation of external assessors or from interviewing adults, whom they had not known previously, in time became an important part of the contextual conditions impacting on other consequences.

CHAPTER 6

CONSEQUENCES OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TASKS

6.1. Eight Main Consequences

There were eight main consequences of the sequences of action/interaction strategies related to cross-curricular tasks in the three case study schools:

- Enhanced self-esteem;
- Increased motivation;
- Improved Communication Skills;
- Improved Self-organisational skills;
- Increased Ability to work as part of a team;
- Increased employability;
- A Capability to think more critically;
- Greater Sense of Community.

Different sequences overlapped and intertwined with one another to varying degrees so that it is impossible to differentiate with any degree of exactitude between the actual contribution of any specific sequence to any specific consequence. Table 9 summarises the impact of conditions relating to students, school and out-of-school on the eight strategies.

Table 9: **Matrix showing a variety of conditions that determined the consequences eight different action/interaction strategies.**

ACTION/ INTERACTION STRATEGY	CAUSAL, CONTEXTUAL and INTERVENING CONDITIONS											
	Student related				School related					Out of school		
	History; Literacy levels	Economic status	Goals	Gender	Ethos	Principal/ Co-ordinator	Relationships	Teacher expertise	Team work	External Assessors	Local community	National level
Management of LCA with reference to cross-curricular Tasks	Poor results. Low self-esteem. Pressure	Create awareness	Short term achievable Personal interests	Single sex Coed Imbalance	Accept/ tolerate. Timetable; Innovative	Proactive, Facilitative /withdrawn	Formal, directive/ Facilitative, negotiative	Inservice/ Support service	Team meetings; Selection; Support for co-ordinator	Briefing of teachers re procedures: Strike.	Manage Network of links	Mandatory tasks. Raise status LCA
Inquiry Based Tasks	Literacy deficit; Oracy; Listening.	Sensitivity	Person / community centred.	Awareness of issues	Self/group Directed v. Teacher Directed	Involved, interest /No interest	Negotiated /assigned topics; Fellow learners	Develop research skills	Timetabled team meetings.	Process/ product. Affirming	Sources print ICT; AOTs Local focus.	Support Service
Experience based Tasks	Literacy deficit; Observation, note taking	Placement v Part-time job v Minico	Employable. Confident. Job contacts.	Stereotypical roles	Attitudes to manual work.	Activating network of contacts	Monitoring; Linking with Modules.	Facilitating Reflection; Self-Assessment	Exchange of views on experiences	Training of assessors re learning from experience	Advisors, role models. Possible Employers	Challenge for teacher education. Employers
Applying Communications Skills to cross-curricular tasks	Reading, Writing Letters, Question, summ--arise, access internet	Speak to people of differing status	Set personal goals re different skills	Literacy deficit of boys	Policy re improving literacy levels	Activating literacy initiatives. Access ICT equipment.	Empathy with slow readers	Applying communication skills	Cross-curricular approach to literacy	Balance written/ oral reports	Adults other than teachers	ICT equipment & training

Table 9 (contd): **Matrix showing a variety of conditions that determined the consequences of eight different action/interaction strategies.**

ACTION/ INTERACTION STRATEGY	CAUSAL, CONTEXTUAL and INTERVENING CONDITIONS											
	Student related				School related					Out of school		
	History Literacy levels	Economic status	Goals	Gender	Ethos	Principal/ Co-ordinator	Relation ships	Teacher expertise	Team work	External Assessors	Local community	National level
Applying Self-organisation skills to tasks.	Improve relations with teacher. Select suitable material	Fit in school with jobs.	Action Plan/ Meet deadline /Career development	Relate/ Work with opposite sex	Access to Guidance service	Flexibility of time-table	Level of negotiation practised	Facilitation skills re action plan, time management & self-assessment	Common consistent approach.	Onus on Student to organise/ present Material to assessor.	Personal responsibility for community initiatives.	Career planning. Currency of LCA qualification
Facilitating Integration per cross-curricular tasks	Summarise	Relate tasks to own life	Link tasks to modules Informed opinions		Holistic approach to learning	Support for holistic learning	Based on mutual respect.	Exploratory teaching methods	Share Over-arching ideas	Training of assessors	Out of / in school talk	Teacher education
Applying Collaborative skills to cross-curricular Tasks	Oral, Listening skills	Consider other views	Agreed group goals.	Both genders	Decision making	Level of interest	Fellow learner	Group work	All members informed.	Individual contributions to group.	Community work	Assessment issues
Formative assessment of Cross-Curricular tasks	Reassuring to individuals and groups	Sensitivity	Satisfaction; Sense of achievement.	Mutual respect	Empathy	Recognition of achievements	Sensitive feed back	Communication skills	Shared. Team awareness.	Balance with summative	Feed back from acts.	Negative public perceptions

6.2. Enhanced Self-esteem

6.2.1. Increased Self-confidence

Young people, involved in Leaving Certificate Applied in the three case study schools, were generally agreed that cross-curricular tasks had increased their self-confidence. The principal activities they credited for the increased confidence were interviewing adults whom they did not know previously, improved relationships with their teachers, a sense of achievement on completing tasks and the positive approach of external assessors.

6.2.2. Interacting with Adults

Students from all three schools were agreed that interviewing adults, whom they did not previously know, in the course of inquiry based tasks and work experience placements was a great source of confidence to them.

When Joan (Inner-city Girls) was asked what was the main thing she had got from the cross-curricular tasks, she replied,

> *Self-confidence, able to do interviews, ... being able to talk to people without having to know them ... the most important thing, self-confidence.*

She described the way cross-curricular tasks had changed a girl who suffered from extreme shyness.

> *... one girl was very shy and would not speak to anyone ... but now she speaks away to everyone.*

Gerri (Inner-city Girls) believed that it was the way Leaving Certificate Applied was organised.

> *It's the way this course is done ... you get to meet people ... you have to go out and make yourself do things ... If I didn't do this course I would probably be too shy to talk to you. Now it doesn't matter ... It made me able to talk to other*

people.

Matthew (Market Town Coed) described what he thought that he had learned from tasks:

> *You learn to meet more people. ... it gives you training how to talk to people you don't know ...*

Angela (Rural Coed) felt very confident about interviewing people she did not know.

> *I don't mind talking to people. ... There is no point in being afraid to ask about things.*

6.2.3. Improved student/teacher relationships

The improved quality of relationships between Leaving Certificate Applied students and their teachers appeared to be a source of increased self-confidence. Students appeared to have been encouraged by the two principals, who showed a particular interest in their work and who were prepared to be flexible regarding timetabling arrangements when inquiry or experience based tasks were in operation. In two schools inquiry based tasks appeared to have brought about a marked change in student/teacher relationships from a formal teacher-talking-down-to-student situation to a more informal one where teacher and student became fellow learners addressing shared problems. The teacher with responsibility for Mathematics and Information Communications Technology in Market Town Coed described the change in his working relationship with students in relation to cross-curricular tasks.

> *The student and myself are forming a bit of a team. The task is personal to them. They want to do well and ...they are stuck for help or whatever ... I am dealing with them on a one to one basis ...When they can see that I am making an effort for them, they will then try and do the same* (Interview May 1997).

A student from Inner-city Girls felt so much more confident that she felt that she could discuss things openly with her teacher.

> *You do all the work and the teacher just helps you if you need help. You can also talk openly about the task* (Questionnaire May 1996).

A Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Coed talked about the difference in the relationship she had with a Leaving Certificate Applied class group with which she done a cross-curricular task and with a Leaving Certificate Applied class group with which she had not done a cross-curricular task.

> *From the time I did my first task with them the whole atmosphere in the class changed. We all became better friends if I could put it that way. I actually noticed because I did not do a task this year with Year 5 LCAs and I don't feel as much part of a team with them as I did with last year's group. I think it's because I didn't do a task with them* ... (Interview May 1997).

The relationship between the principal in Market Town Coed and students with whom he worked on cross-curricular tasks changed to such an extent that they expected to be treated by him in a more adult manner than he treated the rest of the students.

> *In fact a couple of them who had been disciplined for minor offences came to my office. They were annoyed that I would treat them as ordinary students* (Interview May 1997).

6.2.4. Sense of Achievement

Students said that they experienced a sense of achievement on the completion of tasks. Eithne talked about the satisfaction she and her fellow students got from managing a mini-enterprise.

> *You feel proud of what you made yourself... we were not out to make a profit.*

We just wanted to make sure that it worked and that we could sell them ... it was grand in the end. We were delighted we sold so many.

Peter was extremely pleased with the task he had completed on Amnesty International.

It was a great task. It was the best task I did ever...I thought it was the best task I ever did in my life. During the years here in the school I have had to do projects... Amnesty was the best task I ever did.

The Horticulture teacher at Rural Coed talked about the pride the students took in the rockery they had built.

Getting the rocks there and placing them was a major task and they were very enthusiastic about that. I think they saw that it was turning out well and they were enthusiastic about it and very proud of it. And if any students walked in on it - other years - or if they ever pulled up a plant or anything like that they would be enraged. And that would be out of keeping with their general attitude up to that (Interview May 1997).

The Technology teacher at Market Town Coed described how important it was to give recognition to what students had achieved.

There's one lad now that I have. He is particularly weak. He'll keep asking questions. He'll ask and ask and ask. If he comes up with something in his hand at the end of a Task he's absolutely over the moon. He'll go to show it to everyone and sundry and say 'this is what I did'. He's delighted because academically he's weak. Physically he's a big lad but he's quite weak at working with his hands. Putting something together - to you or me it might not appear great...but to him it's a brilliant piece of work and he'd love to get credit for it... and I could say that all of them are quite pleased finishing an article and being able to show it off.

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls also stressed how students liked to display their work to an audience.

> *They love the tasks where the public is invited in and they can perform. We had a buffet for the employers - they loved that task. The other part of the class did a meal for elderly disabled people in a community centre - they absolutely loved it. So if the community can come in or if the teachers can come in and see what they're doing they love that* (Interview May 1997).

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed also described the sense of achievement displayed by students at the completion of a task.

> *They feel that they have a lot of work done when they have a task finished and it's examined. They're very proud of it and they certainly insist that you mind their folder very carefully...* (Interview May 1997).

The teacher with responsibility for ICT at Market Town Coed commented on the enjoyment they got from the tasks.

> *They enjoy the tasks because... I notice a certain point maybe in the last two weeks that they really enjoy the task... number one they are very, very busy...they have this deadline to meet ... everyone is in the same boat... they are learning a lot ... achieving a lot, producing a lot.*

The principal of Market Town Coed commented on the growth in self-confidence in some students.

> *One student who is now completing the second year.... he would have come through a weaker stream...he wasn't very academic and he said to me in the last couple of weeks 'Sir, I'd like to do a Post Leaving Certificate course. I'd like to stay on in school. I don't know what I would like to do but I'd like to stay on for another year in school'. Now compare him with going back three or four years*

ago when the VPT programme was here most of the students wanted to get out. Anything that came along in the form of a job, one hour a week in a supermarket, and they would be gone. This boy would have fallen into that category two or three years ago. He has now completed two years of excellent attendance and wants to know what can he do next... he's enjoying school and is very proud of what he has done so far.

While the co-ordinator at Market Town Coed agreed that some gained in confidence she pointed out that not all students did.

I think many students - not all of them - would have benefited a lot as regards confidence. They can see what they can do. They have something tangible at the end of it. By and large they are very proud of their task.

6.2.5. Impact of Assessment Procedures on Students' Self-confidence

The positive approach of the majority of external assessors of cross-curricular tasks was a major source of self-confidence to the students. They appeared to have been affirmed by the interest shown by the assessors not only in their written work but also in their opinions about contemporary issues (See Section 5.5.11. above). Nora (Rural Coed) appeared to have enjoyed her discussion with the assessor about her future plans.

We were talking about what I wanted to do when I left school. I liked that...

(Interview April 1997)

Joan (Inner-city Girls) also said that she enjoyed the interview with the assessor, where she described to him the tests she had carried out on different types of timber in relation to her project on wooden furniture. The co-ordinator at Rural Coed believed that the external assessors had a very positive influence on students.

The external assessors have always made them feel as if they were worth

something and it has improved them immensely. And they're very happy when they have come through it.

6.2.6. Limited Enhancement of Self-esteem

In the three case study schools cross-curricular tasks appeared to have given the young people involved increased self-confidence and an enhanced if uncritical self-image. On the other hand critical self-esteem appeared to have been enhanced in only one school where teachers provided sensitive feedback as they facilitated students in becoming more involved in self-assessment. Students were not greatly helped in enhancing their self-esteem in the second school as the teachers confessed to feeling inadequate in facilitating self-assessment. In the third school self-assessment was not encouraged as the co-ordinator claimed that it was unkind to ask students to criticise their own work.

Increased self-confidence in the case of some students or both increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem in the case of others was the consequence of the different sequences of action/interaction strategies related to cross-curricular tasks. The resulting self-confidence or self esteem in time became a positive contextual condition in relation to those same strategies.

6.3. Increased Motivation

6.3.1. Sources of Motivation

There are indicators that cross-curricular tasks made a significant contribution to the increased motivation of students. The main sources of motivation were the presentation of tasks in the form of short-term achievable goals, the on-going accumulation of credits and the level of freedom given to students in choosing topics. The increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem resulting from participation in cross-curricular tasks also appeared to have been an intrinsic source of motivation for students.

6.3.2. Short-term Goals

The organisation of cross-curricular tasks in the form of clearly defined short-term goals appeared to have encouraged students to become more motivated in their work. They said that there was far less pressure when they had tasks assessed intermittently. Debbie (Inner-city Girls) said,

> *It's much easier than the other Leaving Certificate. You don't have so much coming on top of you... thinking about the whole exam... you get it over bit by bit* (Interview December 1996).

Mandy (Inner-city Girls) agreed.

> *There would not be that much pressure put on people at the end of the year...I like all the tasks scattered out through the year and time to do them* (Interview December 1996).

Nora (Rural Coed) was glad that she had taken Leaving Certificate Applied.

> *I would be in trouble by now, if I took the ordinary Leaving Certificate. It takes two months before everyone starts to work in the ordinary Leaving Certificate. It's better if pressure was on all the way through* (Interview December 1996).

There were two related perceptions of short-term goals by teachers. Short-term goals appeared to be appropriate for students who were perceived to have a short attention span. They were also perceived as a means of keeping students busy so that disciplinary problems would not arise.

The Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls felt that short-term goals were appropriate for Leaving Certificate Applied students.

> *The weaker children like to work towards short-term goals. I think that they need short term goals in LCA and I think they see it, not like a big exam, but like as if this is such an important thing that we have to do and it's going towards our final mark* (Interview May 1997).

The Technology teacher at Market Town Coed also saw the appropriateness of short-term goals for students with a short attention span.

> *The frequency of the assessment helps to focus them. Their attention span is not long. It's not going to last from September 1995 to June 1997. So their attention span is ideal for a few weeks. You do a task in a few weeks. You put the thing together and you assess it after a few weeks and you go on to something different. There's variety in it as well.*

Short-term goals were perceived by the teacher of Mathematics and ICT to be a means of keeping students very busy so as to reduce the dangers of disciplinary problems developing.

> *In LCA from Day One you have students who are definitely capable of causing major discipline problems. Because you have all this continuous assessment and all these tasks and exams and all this work that has to be done you can put those things in front of them and help cure your discipline problems. For example you could say to them in September ' you have a task to have done by*

October' - a deadline to be met... apply a certain amount of pressure...apply a lot of work and when you keep students busy your discipline problems will be less (Interview May 1997).

6.3.3. Accumulation of Credits

The visible ongoing accumulation of credits also resulted in increased motivation. Students accumulated a possible maximum of 27% of credits through cross-curricular tasks during the two-year period. The total percentage of credits accumulated by the students who were interviewed ranged as follows:

- Inner-city Girls: 16/27 (Debbie) to 25/27 (Eithne);
- Market Town Coed: 10/27 (Dave) to 19/27 (Matthew);
- Rural Coed: 10/27 (Percy) to 22/27 (Philip).

Only four of the 23 students interviewed referred to the regular accumulation of credits as a source of motivation.

Diana (Inner-city Girls): *you get a chance to build up your marks*

Aidan (Rural Coed): *I hope to get three points for it (a task) anyway..*

Billy (Rural Coed): *Glad I did LCA because I want to get more of a chance.... in the ordinary Leaving Certificate I would just sit one paper at the end of the year.*

Eithne (Inner-city Girls) *I got 32 or 34 credits last year...We got nothing back for this year on account of the strike ...we will probably get them all at the end of the year.*

Angela (Market Town Coed) complained that she had got 2 credits for one task and 0 credits for another and she could not see any difference between the two tasks and Mark said that he was not happy with his grades. Apart from that none of the remaining

students spoke about grades. They appeared to be much more interested in their interactions with the assessors than in the number of credits they had got.

On the other hand many teachers identified the accumulation of credits as a major source of motivation. The Hotel, Catering and Tourism teacher at Inner-city Girls linked the motivating power of short-term goals with the accumulation of credits.

> *They do a half-year work, get it over, get it finished and the results come out. The fact that they actually get the mark for the task quite quickly - I think that's vital. And generally they do quite well in the task as well which encourages them to go on and do better next time. They feel good about getting on well. And actually the fact that they have built up so many credits in the first year of the programme brings them back into the second year of the programme. And it's something I learnt last September when I thought that we might only have one class from the two classes we had the previous year... They all came back - because they had got so many credits in 5th year they felt it was a pity not to continue into 6th year.*

When I challenged her that it may have been because they were enjoying the course she diplomatically reminded me that there was a multiplicity of reasons and that certainly their personal enjoyment was an important factor.

> Ó Donnabháin: *Was it the fact that they got the credits rather than the fact that they had enjoyed the programme so much*?
>
> Teacher: *I suppose both. But the impression I got was "Well, we have got so much we would like to finish what we have started." It might have to do too with the climate outside of employment/unemployment but it's speaking well of the course. It means they're enjoying it. Because if they weren't enjoying it they would not come back.*

The teacher of German at Inner-city Girls believed that the accumulation of grades was a source of motivation and of a competitive atmosphere.

> *I think probably getting their results so soon after is fabulous in the first year. They get results shortly after the first task. If they see that they get a 3 or even a 2 it really eggs them on and encourages them in trying to do better next time. Whereas they're not waiting - it's not a final thing and that is fabulous. And they can see their progress. If they get a 1, they can say "I'll get a 3 next time" and if they get a 3 they're really delighted... There is a great sense of competition. You know they're quite competitive.*

The co-ordinator at Rural Coed stressed how students appeared to enjoy tasks that involved physical labour.

> *One thing I would say about the task is that the more practical the task the better the student enjoys it, the more physical labour is in it the better they enjoy it.*

The teacher of Mathematics and ICT at Market Town Coed was certain that their practice of staggering the deadlines throughout the half-year period was proving to be a source of motivation because of the accumulation of credits.

> *... definitely, definitely and they are clocking credits up all the time. Once they start seeing that they are being assessed. They know that there are teachers coming in from other schools. They know it's not a joke that it is a serious matter ... and it hasn't gone overboard to the extent that it is putting the fear of God in them...*

The teacher of Construction / Manufacturing (Market Town Coed) stressed the enjoyment that students got from tasks.

> *They enjoy them.... they enjoyed this one now...they enjoyed this more than any*

other one as such.....I don't know if it is the pressure to get it done on time and that's maybe part of it as well but they are really getting engrossed in it.... whether it is enjoyment or the pressure of time... they are interested in getting it done or getting it finished...

He felt that the accumulation of credits encouraged them to stay at school.

From the point of view of having to wait till the end of two years and having no feedback as regards how you are going, the task is a big improvement, because straightaway they can see. While they might not have the exact mark they got...they still know from the external examiners' comments and from my comments how they are getting on. We all like a bit of praise now and again and it's a great way of praising the kid as he goes along. As well as that they learn from it. If they did make a mistake for example if they did not get it finished, they know for the next task the right thing is to get dug in a little bit earlier in the actual making of it.

The principal at Market Town Coed agreed that the enjoyment students got from tasks was reinforced by the awareness that they were accumulating credits

I think some of them really get a buzz out of the tasks ...some of them really really enjoy them. When I say some of them I would say the majority. There is a small percentage who disinvolve themselves from the Task. They disinvolve themselves from school and don't present tasks. I would say that the vast majority get a buzz out of the task in that they are presenting finished work and they know that finished work on its own carries marks and credits.

The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed said that more students were staying on at school for Leaving Certificate Applied than stayed for the Vocational Preparation and Training programme that the school had provided previously. She claimed that the

cross-curricular tasks helped to keep them at school.

> *There is a certain amount of novelty really and they are able to cope with what is going on. They are able to cope with it. There are different subjects like Social Education...new to them and interesting. The course is certainly a very good course ...and they would have found it very interesting. The fact that the tasks are assessed every six months helps also. It keeps them focused all right.* (Interview May 1997)

6.3.4. Level of student autonomy

There was a marked difference in the levels of student autonomy in Inner-city Girls compared to the other two case study schools. By the end of the second year Inner-city Girls students appeared to have taken personal responsibility for the management of their tasks. The co-ordinator accepted that "they don't want to be told what to do". In the other two schools the teachers retained control over the management of tasks. The Inner-city Girls students were clearly motivated by the sense of ownership that they had in relation to the cross-curricular tasks (see Section 5.5.4.)

6.4. Improved Communications Skills

6.4.1. Literacy Deficits

Wide range vocabulary tests (Atwell & Wells 1937) indicated that a high proportion of young people who took Leaving Certificate Applied in 1995-1997 had significant literacy deficits. 76% of the 68 students from the three case study schools, who took the standardised tests, had an age norm of 13 or lower. The average chronological age of the participants at the time of the test was 17yrs 4mths. The percentage of students with an age norm of 13 or lower varied from school to school:

Inner-city Girls 67%;

Market Town Coed 83%;

Rural Coed 72%.

39% of the 69 students who took the Atwell & Wells wide range vocabulary test had an age norm of 11 or lower. The problem was more severe in Market Town Coed and Rural Coed than in Inner-city Girls. Rural Coed had two students with an age norm of 8, one student with an age norm of 9 and one student with an age norm of 10. That meant that four of the 18 students in the Leaving Certificate Applied class at Rural Coed had an extremely limited vocabulary as they had an age norm of 10 or less. Market Town Coed had three students who had an age norm of 9 and three students who had an age norm of 10. That meant that six of the class of 24 had an age norm of 10 or less. Inner-city Girls had one student with an age norm of 10. While teachers made references to literacy problems there did not appear to be any coherent collaborative initiatives in any of the three schools to address them.

Table 10: **Numbers of Leaving Certificate Applied students(1995-97) in case study schools, who attained different age norms in Atwell & Wells Wide Range Vocabulary Test in October 1996 (N=69).**

Age Norm	Total Number	Inner-city Girls	Market Town Coed	Rural Coed
8	2	0	0	2
9	4	0	3	1
10	5	1	3	1
11	16	7	6	3
12	13	6	4	3
13	11	4	4	3
14	8	3	1	4
15	9	5	3	1
16	0	0	0	0
17	1	1	0	0
Total	69	27	24	18

The average chronological age of the 27 Inner-city Girls students who took the standardised tests was 17yrs 5mths. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells1937) was 12.7. The average chronological age of interviewees from Inner-city Girls was 17yrs 8mths. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells) was 14.

The average chronological age of the 24 Market Town Coed students who took the standardised tests was 17yrs 4mths. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells) was 11.8. The average chronological age of interviewees from Market Town Coed was 17yrs 1mth. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells) was 11.8.

The average chronological age of the 18 Rural Coed students who took the standardised tests was 17yrs 4mths. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells) was 11.9. The average chronological age of interviewees from Rural Coed was 17yrs 9mths. Their average age norm (Atwell & Wells) was 12.4.

There was a significant difference in the vocabulary range of Leaving Certificate Applied students in the three case study schools. The greatest difference was between Market Town Coed with an average age norm of 11.8 and Inner-city Girls with an average age norm of 12.7. The differences were even more pronounced in relation to the interviewees. Whereas the average age norm of the interviewees was a mirror image of that of the entire class at Market Town Coed, it was skewed upwards in the other two schools. The largest discrepancy occurred in the case of Inner-city Girls where the average age norm for the whole class group was 12.7 and that of the interviewees was 14. The results of the Atwell & Wells (1937) test need to be considered in relation to the grades the students attained in English at Junior Certificate (Table 11). The proliferation of Pass grades appeared to have masked the extent of the literacy deficit. Some of the grades are puzzling. For example Joan attained a Wide Range Vocabulary (Atwell & Wells) age norm of 17 and a Grade D (Ordinary Level) in Junior Certificate English whereas Monica from the same school attained a Wide Range Vocabulary (Atwell & Wells) age norm of 12 and a Grade C (Ordinary Level) in Junior Certificate English.

Table 11: **List of students from three case study schools who were interviewed showing chronological age, age norm based on Atwell & Wells test and grades in Junior Certificate English.**

School	Student	Chronological Age at time of test, Oct 1996	Age Norm	Junior Certificate Grade in English
Inner-city Girls	Joan	17yrs 2mths	17	Ordinary D
	Eithne	18yrs 8mths	15	Higher C
	Gerri	18yrs 6mths	15	Ordinary C
	Mandy	18yrs 10mths	15	Ordinary D
	Debbie	17yrs 0 mths	13	Ordinary D
	Monica	16yrs 8mths	12	Ordinary C
	Lucy	16yrs 9mths	11	Foundation C
Market Town Coed	Shay	16yrs 5mths	15	Ordinary B
	Peter	16yrs 5mths	13	Foundation C
	Matthe	16yrs 11mths	12	Foundation C
	Ned	17yrs 2mths	12	Foundation B
	Angela	18yrs 0mths	11	Foundation C
	Mark	17yrs 5mths	11	Foundation C
	Dave	17yrs 2mths	9	Foundation C
Rural Coed	Fonsie	18yrs 2mths	15	Higher D
	Billy	16yrs 11mths	14	Higher E
	Aidan	16yrs 6mths	13	Foundation C
	Nora	18yrs 6mths	13	Ordinary C
	Tony	18yrs 3mths	11	Foundation C
	Murt	18yrs 2mths	11	Not to hand
	Percy	17yrs 10mths	10	Foundation D

6.4.2. Teachers' increased awareness of Literacy Deficit

Cross-curricular tasks appeared to have helped teachers appreciate the extent of the literacy deficit that they had not previously appreciated fully. There were indications that students need to have reached a certain level of proficiency at basic communications skills in order to be able to participate in a cross-curricular task to their own satisfaction. The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed gave two examples where

students dropped out of school because they appeared to feel that cross-curricular tasks were exposing their literacy deficits to their peers.

> *I know that last year one or two would have dropped out because of the task. There was no way that we could convince them that they could do the task. One lad definitely left because he was not able to handle the task.*

The mother of the student in question had informed her that he was upset about being unable to do the task.

> *I tried as far as possible to explain it to her. I spoke to him about it. I showed him how to follow a particular routine but he did leave ...*

It appeared that it was only when the young person left that she appreciated the full extent of his literacy deficit. She cited a second example.

> *Another student found the tasks very difficult to do and he performed very poorly in them. Again he would have been at a low literacy level. His mother would have been anxious to keep him at school but he really did not want to do the task. I helped him out a certain amount but it was very difficult to motivate him to do anything. He did not want to do it. It exposed his weaknesses to the others. The very bottom few in the class would have found the tasks too difficult...*

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls also gave an example of how tasks had revealed a student's weaknesses that had remained hidden for years.

> *I had one student who would always have been a very quiet student in class. She was viewed as being very weak. Then through her task people were beginning to see how introverted she was and that she needed help. By the time it came to mini-company we realised that she could not even use a scissors! Now, we've taken steps that she will be enrolled in the rehabilitation programme with her*

parents' permission. She will do a two-year training programme in a sheltered workshop.

The co-ordinator believed that the school would never have been fully aware of the extent of the student's difficulties were it not for the cross-curricular tasks.

Only for those tasks I don't think we'd ever have realised. We would have realised that she was slow and that she found school difficult - we would never have realised the depth of her difficulties - I'm fully convinced of that.

6.4.3. Support for Basic Literacy Skills

Many teachers believed that cross-curricular tasks had been supportive of the development of basic literacy skills. The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed loudly praised what tasks had done for students with poor literacy levels.

When I see what work some students have done -students who would have had a very poor level of literacy coming in here nearly five years ago and see the work they have turned out. Tasks have allowed students to develop their interests and to follow something to a conclusion where they feel they have achieved something.

The teacher of English and Communications at Inner-city Girls described the manner in which some students were constrained by lack of literacy skills.

I would think it slows them down from the point of view that their reading skills would be much slower. Some of them, quite literally, when you give something out to them you have to read it over with them. Others you may not have to do that with them, but they would still be very slow reading anything that was not very concrete and familiar to them. Some of them would also have a problem with writing skills, spelling and grammar. Even some of their handwriting

would be quite illegible.

She believed that the task helped them to practise communications skills in a non-threatening situation.

I would think the task helps them in that they are practising those skills and at the same time they are researching something. I think they're not as conscious of having trouble with reading and writing. By that I mean they might have to phone somebody or write a letter to somebody for information and it gives it a bit of variety.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism course at Inner-city Girls also commented on the low level of basic literacy skills, but she believed that preparing reports on tasks on the computer encouraged students to be more careful of their spellings..

Their literacy skills are quite poor. They're very poor at spelling and their English grammar is poor. They're just not good at writing things really but the computer helps them. I think when they see how neat it looks printed out on computer it encourages them to make an effort with the spelling as well, and even layout and things like that. But basically some of them are very weak at spelling - especially spelling. I think the task encourages them to try better. I think the task is wonderful for helping them to keep to the point. There are a series of headings. It helps them to focus on one thing at a time and do one thing properly before they move on to the next thing.

While the co-ordinator at Rural Coed believed that tasks helped students to improve their literacy skills, he did not believe that cross-curricular tasks alone would solve the literacy problems .

The tasks certainly help. There's no question about that. The one thing that must

be understood clearly from the beginning of the Leaving Certificate Applied is that the student you are dealing with has had difficulty with both reading, writing and arithmetic as they've come along through the school.

He decried the policy of not providing remedial help for students who require it as they grow older.

There is a perception that they do not need help when they go into the Leaving Certificate Applied. Well, my honest belief is that the remedial education sector should still be available to those students at that stage. *And if possible timetabled for them.*

He described how he had dealt with a student who had great difficulty in writing legibly.

We have one candidate who is extremely poor at writing. It can't be read... I went to his mother and talked to her and I said "Look it, if your son submits his folder in that state it won't be read". And she said "What do you think we should do about it?" and I said "Why not have his folder typed? Why not give out ... you give his folder and send the child with his folder - there's an agency in town that type"... I said "send the child down with it, have his folder typed up and submit a couple of pages of his writing and let the examiner decide would he have been able to read it or would he not, and just show him why it was typed and let your son go in and tell the examiner that he had it typed out for this particular reason." And I found that it worked very well. The student was so happy with it. I mean that poor fellow spent nights crying at home writing out what no one would be able to read. So I took it on myself - it might be wrong, I don't know.

One unexpected consequence of cross-curricular tasks has been the raising of awareness

among teachers of the possibility of addressing the low levels of literacy of so many older adolescents in schools in Ireland.

6.4.4. Interaction between Tasks and Communications Skills

Inquiry based tasks provided many opportunities for students to practise communications skills. The co-ordinator at Market Town Coed explained.

> *They go for information to the library. They go around to other teachers. They go around to other people in the town. They definitely have improved on that. One area where they would not have had the confidence before is making telephone calls to organisations and so on. The tasks have certainly broadened their horizons and made them more interested in things*

Argela (Market Town Coed) described the various communications skills she practised in her investigation of a career in childcare. She said that she would like a career in computers and management but that she might have to settle for childcare.

> *I prepared a plan. I wrote away for information to three Regional Technical Colleges. I have a list of questions prepared. I got a book from a teacher. I went to the library and got another book. I wrote letters and I filed the replies. I did half-and-half at home and in here in school. I interviewed different people.*

Ned (Market Town Coed) described how they used newspapers as a source of information about Travellers.

> *We're doing it as a group task so we are all giving one another a helping hand. I used to read newspapers and mark out the most important pieces. My friends would then write them out. There was plenty to keep the three of them busy. We have 14 pages of information. We went to the library and read up on books.*

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls explained how the tasks helped students to improve

their reading and writing and their capability to formulate questions.

I think it helps them because we don't allow transcription from books. They have to pick out the important points of information and rephrase it in their own words. I think it's important that we can see if they really understand it. Reading, writing - yes! They get a chance to improve how they ask questions. How they can interview somebody and take down their response, how they can take information from a tape if they've taped the person interviewed. I think it's practical experience.

Some students were also given an opportunity to practise higher levels of literacy skills as they wrote reports on the analyses of information gathered and on the generalisations they had formulated as a result.

Many teachers suggested that cross-curricular tasks had contributed to the improvement in students' oral skills. Monica (Inner-city Girls) experienced difficulties in getting answers to questions she had about drugs but she appeared to have enjoyed the experience.

I got most of the information from the guards (police). I phoned Henry Street station and asked them if I could get in contact with the garda that is over the drug situation. They told me to come down the following day between 11 and 12 and that there would be a guard to meet me. I asked over the phone if it would be OK to ask a number of questions. But he said he couldn't answer all my questions even if I had a questionnaire. He met me and he ran me through a few points in a book. He said he could not give out any other information at all. All he could give was in this particular book.

Ó Donnabháin: *How do you feel going down there interviewing people you did not know?*

Monica: *I think it's great because you are getting to know a lot more about what's going on around you...*

The Principal at Market Town Coed ascribed the improvement in students' oral and listening skills to the interviews they had to do in relation to tasks.

The tasks help the student very much in developing oral skills, listening skills. Most recently I brought two of those students to speak about their programmes at a seminar in Dublin. The two students absolutely surprised me with their level of oral skills in front of an intimidating group of people. It is something that has developed from having to verbally present their task and the constant interviews. In terms of listening skills it is harder to assess but when they are asked a question they are able to answer it. They have certainly surprised me with that.

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls believed that students' oral skills improved in direct relationship to their self-confidence.

I think their oral and listening skills improve overall. Their oral skills in direct relationship to their confidence improve dramatically. Kids who wouldn't have dreamt of even opening their mouths in front of 10 other students are now speaking in front of parents and teachers quite confidently which is really, I think, a great achievement for anybody.

While the co-ordinator at Rural Coed agreed that tasks probably helped oral skills he was very dissatisfied about the listening skills of the students.

Listening skill is a big difficulty with the calibre of student that you have. They have great difficulty in actually listening attentively to what's going on because their attention span is quite short. We've tried our damndest to improve that but

I think it's getting worse!!

Would it be possible that the difference in listening skills in Leaving Certificate Applied students was influenced by the quality of student/teacher relationships in the schools?

6.4.5. Role of ICT in Cross-curricular Tasks

Students who had ready access to computers applied a wide range of Information Communications Technology skills in the course of their cross-curricular tasks. Peter (Market Town Coed) explained that he had done most of his research on Amnesty international on a CD Rom that the organisation sent him. Angela (Market Town Coed) described how she stayed in school until six o'clock in the evening working on her task on the school computer. Eithne (Inner-city Girls) was particularly pleased with all the opportunities she had to improve her ICT skills.

> *Yes, it's good. I am enjoying it .You see we get more time on the computer than any of the other classes because we have a task to do on it. We had an hour class this morning, an hour class on Monday and then we have a double on Thursday and a double on Friday. I don't think that ordinary Leaving Certs have that much time on the computers.*

Eithne believed that she would have a definite advantage over students who followed the traditional Leaving Certificate when she went on to Further Education courses.

> *So we'll have an advantage next year because we'll have a computer course done. We'd know database, spreadsheet...we have gone through eveything well not everything but loads on the computer. So when we do a computer course we'd know exactly what is going on...we'd know our way around the computer*

over doing our tasks on the computer ...headings and cover pages and everything like that.

Her classmate, Joan, was very dissatisfied because she did not have access to the computers during the second year of the course. The arrangement had been that all Leaving Certificate Applied students had an introductory course in ICT in the first year, but in the second there was not officially any ICT for those who had not opted for it as a specialism. Joan thought that this was a major mistake.

It was a big mistake to drop ICT in second year. It should be made compulsory. Everyone should do it.

The Principal of Inner-city Girls explained how she had tried to correct the imbalance between the students who had opted to take ICT as a specialism and those who did not.

I've timetabled the group who did not take ICT as a specialism to the computer room one slot per week to type up their tasks. I had a teacher timetabled there but I changed the timetable recently for another unrelated reason. So I now sit in with the class, and they come in, switch on the machines straight after lunch and they get into the programme very quickly. They know how to get into it. If any student has any difficulty she can call on one or two others, who are very good. One girl, Cliona, is excellent and she is so willing to help others!

The Principal of Inner-city Girls was so impressed by the progress students were making in ICT that she decided to make it available to all Leaving Certificate Applied students as a specialism in future.

They're doing tremendous work on the computer. I actually think it's very important that Information Technology has become a specialism. And we've seen them develop so much, that we hope in future to take IT as a specialism in year 2 for all students. This year one class had IT and the other class did

agriculture and the two classes had Hotel and Catering. This year now the 5th year group - all of them will keep IT in 6th year because we have seen how well IT has gone for us,

Students in Rural Coed were very unhappy at being deprived of access to computers in the second year of the course.

Tony: *It was a pity that we were not allowed do computers in the second Year...*

Aidan: *Knocking computers out in the second year was a big mistake...*

Nora: *The only change I'd make in the course. Computers should be on for everyone in the second year. You're only really getting into it*

Billy: *Computers were great.....but...what we had learnt we have it all forgotten.*

The Co-ordinator at Rural Coed agreed with the students.

If I were honest the most successful class for our present group that are soon leaving. If I asked them what was the class they liked best of all, what's the class they improved most at, it would be the Information Technology course.

He explained that they could not provide Information Communications Technology as a specialism because of staffing constraints. It is difficult to accept that explanation in view of the fact that the other two schools, with similar levels of staffing in one case and inferior levels of staffing in the other, were providing ICT as a specialism.

Now, unfortunately, we were not in a position to build it into a Vocational Specialism. We would love to have built it into one but we don't have the staff available at the moment to do it. And the students who did IT for one year have really improved beyond measure. The teacher was stunned at how much they came on in comparison to other classes. And had they been able to keep it on a

second year I think they would be quite proficient leaving this school. And unfortunately it didn't happen.

The approach to ICT at Rural Coed appears to be another indication of the isolation of the Leaving Certificate Applied co-ordinator from the school management.

We have discussed it here with the management of the school. If there was any way possible at all that we could allow every student taking the Leaving Certificate Applied course to do IT for 2 years I think it would make an awful difference.

In Market Town Coed the staff appeared to have integrated ICT into all the tasks as many of the investigations appears to have been focussed on the computer room. The ICT teacher at Market Town Coed explained:

We would have a lot of CDs here encyclopaedias and such and they would have a lot on technology. Anything you want really and they would have used that and the Internet. ICT is a great source of knowledge to them.

The Principal of Market Town Coed was impressed by the number of Leaving Certificate Applied students who stayed on after school in order to use the computers.

On Friday evening when I'm closing up the place the computer room has got half a dozen Leaving Certificate Applied students there. Not only that but every evening they are using the computer to put together reports on tasks and they are using it to find out information.

He agreed that ICT played an important part in all the tasks at Market Town Coed and that it was particularly supportive of the weaker students.

Information Technology is central to everything that they do from the practical Task to the English Task. Information Technology is becoming their method of expression because it's the great human leveller. The computer does not realise

whether you have an Honours standard or Pass standard in English. Your work can be very presentable whether or not you are the most literate person in the world. I find that the weaker students get much greater satisfaction out of using computers to present their material, because it looks as good as the person beside him/her.

6.4.6. Student Commitment and Communications Skills

Tasks appeared to be a two-way link between students' commitment to their studies and their level of communication skills. Provided students had reached a certain level of basic literacy, tasks appeared to have provided a non-threatening environment in which they were encouraged to apply a wide range of communications skills to a variety of situations in which they had a personal interest. Greater personal interest in their studies interacted positively in improving communication skills, and improved communications skills appeared to have provided an incentive to become more involved in their studies.

6.5. Improved Self-organisational Skills

Only one of the case study schools appeared to have given students an opportunity to facilitate the development of empowering self-organisational skills such as planning, decision-making, time management and self-assessment. The Inner-city Girls co-ordinator claimed that her students were effectively managing their own tasks at the end of the course.

> *They want to pick an area in which they are interested. They bring all the skills into the second year of the course that they've learned in the previous year. They're not afraid of the tasks any more ... They've matured so much, this year - they really, really have... they've become so mature that they think they can make the decision, and not alone that they can make it but they want to make it, which I think is fantastic...*

The ability of Inner-city Girls students to manage their tasks proactively appeared to have been as a result of a definite policy implemented by the co-ordinator of gradually increasing the degree of autonomy of students of all levels of ability. Students were facilitated in devloping and practising self-assessment skills as their level of autonomy grew.

The position in the other two case study schools was very different. Students had little opportunity of developing self-organisational skills because teachers kept control of the management of cross-curricular tasks. There appeared to have been two main reasons for the reluctance of teachers to lessen the degree of control they had over the students. There were the fears of indiscipline prompted by the strained relationships that had existed initially between teachers and some of the students. Teachers had low expectations of the students because of their indifferent examination results (See Section 5.5.4. above). Some teachers admitted that they lacked expertise in facilitating

students in the development of planning, decision-making, time management and self-assessment skills. In Market Town Coed students' opportunity to develop time management skills were constrained by the introduction of staggered deadlines for each task by the co-ordinator.

6.6. Increased Ability to work as part of team

Group tasks provided students with an opportunity to practise a wide range of collaborative skills such as shared planning, shared decision-making, shared time management and shared self-assessment. There is evidence to suggest that tasks did contribute to an increased team spirit among participants. In a survey of four schools, including the three case study schools, I presented a list of 20 possible characteristics that students could have developed from Leaving Certificate Applied cross-curricular tasks. 72 students and 26 teachers participated. The highest percentage of each group, 56% of students and 61% of teachers identified the ability to 'act as part of a team' as one of the five main consequences of cross-curricular tasks (See Table 12).

There are strong indications from the interviews that the students enjoyed group tasks despite the fact that the majority of teachers interviewed claimed that students had difficulty in becoming accustomed to group work. Admittedly the difficulties in getting each individual student to identify her/his personal contribution to group tasks for external assessment purposes were clearly an inhibiting factor (See Section 5.5.9. and Section 5.5.11. above). A probable barrier was the lack of regular meetings of the teaching team where individuals could have helped one another in coming to terms with what was a major change of teaching strategy for some teachers (see Section 5.5.6. above). The co-ordinator at Rural Coed was surprised at the manner in which collaborative work increased even though the teachers were only minimally supporting it.

> *You find that there's an awful lot of co-operation and the remarkable thing about it - initially when they go into it they're not used to working like this. They have been in a system where you work for yourself. And for the first couple of weeks in the task they find great difficulty in actually getting down in groups*

and discussing and listening, taking on board other people's views and other ideas and then imparting their ideas. But as time goes on they share it quite well and it's actually interesting to watch them interact among themselves.

Individual teachers showed an awareness of the learning opportunities provided by collaborative work. The teacher with responsibility for Hotel Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls stressed the importance of cross-curricular tasks in helping young people to develop a sense of responsibility to others.

... they must realise that group effort and being part of a team demands responsibility. I find that they learn that from the tasks.

She described how she attempted to convert situations where an individual student had left the rest of the class down into a learning activity.

I feel that if I'm really going to teach them something it's better to run with it for a couple of hours - let them maybe sweat it out, whatever way you want to put it, and then maybe come to the rescue.

She would not intervene personally but involve other students in rescuing the situation.

I might get maybe two people to volunteer to do the work that this person failed to do. But let them see the crunch that it has got them into. It does teach responsibility, I feel, which would prepare them for life after school...

While some of her colleagues saw laggards in a group as a serious impediment to collaborative work, the teacher in question used them as a resource in developing leadership qualities.

There are still members of the team who can sit back a bit and because it's a team effort the others will pull that person up a bit and they'll say "come on now!" and leadership qualities become obvious. People that are less inclined for work - their qualities or characteristics become obvious. I think that it's

character forming. And I think that even the ones that do sit back a bit, once they see that they are letting the group down they shake themselves up a bit usually and get back on track.

The Report of the Chief Examining Group(1996) noted that there was evidence of a high level of team work in some tasks.

Examiners reported positively on the high level of teamwork evidenced in some of the tasks assessed. Such teamwork was developing essential interpersonal skills in students and encouraging collaborative initiative and responsibility. It was also observed as contributing to a more positive attitude by students towards school in general (Chief Examiner 1996:9).

6.7. Increased Employability

6.7.1. Strategies

Strategies directly related to increasing students' employability were in the form of inquiry based tasks relating to career explorations and studies of local entrepreneurs, and experience based tasks on work experience placements and mini-enterprises. The consequences of some of those strategies were positive while others were questionable. Inquiry based tasks relating to career explorations were found by students to be helpful. Students generally appeared to have clear coherent career plans. Studies of local entrepreneurs appeared to suffer from inadequate preparation of the students involved in competencies relating to inquiry based learning.

6.7.2. Career Explorations

The great majority of students interviewed appeared to have had clear coherent career plans. They indicated that tasks relating to possible future careers had been very helpful. Nora (Rural Coed) was quite clear that she expected to use the task to fill in the gaps in her knowledge about nursery nursing.

> *I want to do Childcare ... nursery nursing ... I know now that I want to do that but I don't know where I'm going to do it yet.*

Lucy (Inner-city Girls) used the work experience placements to investigate possible future careers.

> *I felt I had two choices of what I would do after school - child minding or computers. Now I know. Now I feel that child minding would be better for me. I went to a creche on work experience. I was not allowed to go to any other creche. I had to try other workplaces.*

Market Town Coed was at a particular disadvantage regarding career guidance, as there

was not any guidance counsellor on the staff. The Leaving Certificate Applied class organised a careers exhibition for other students in the form of a group task. Mark described what he had done.

> *A Careers Exhibition was held in October. Every student in the class was asked to pick a career. My choice was electrical apprenticeships ... others had several options. I went to a firm and they gave me all the information I needed on electrical apprenticeships. I wrote away to the ESB (Electricity Supply Board)...*

He said that approximately 80 students attended

> *We all had our own separate tables and they were all walking around from table to table asking questions*
>
> **Ó Donnabháin:** *Did many ask you questions?*
>
> **Mark:** *A few did, not as many as I expected.... Both boys and girls asked questions*
>
> **Ó Donnabháin:** *Were you happy that you picked that particular one?*
>
> **Mark:** *I was because I want to go into that line of business ... I want to serve an apprenticeship and I know now how the system works.*

The Market Town Coed co-ordinator explained what she hoped students would gain from the task.

> *It may have helped them all right in making their choices... I don't know about specific careers, but as a class it helped them to organise themselves. I was trying to let them see that getting a job was a task in itself in that you prepared for the interview adequately... many of them would regard a job interview as going in and doing it and no more about it... I was trying to get across to them that they needed to prepare for it...*

A worrying aspect of the Careers exhibition in Market Town Coed was the absence of any measures being taken to check the quality of information that was given to other students. Sheila O'Driscoll, a member of Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service since its inception in 1995 and joint manager since August 1999, said in August 1999 that she was extremely worried about the quality of information given to students in the context of Vocational Preparation throughout the country (Interview August 1999).

6.7.3 Interacting with Local Entrepreneurs

The Guidance Counsellor in Rural Coed organised a series of tasks in which students were required to do a profile of successful business people in the locality of the school. This was an interesting task, as it appeared to have been an effective way of finding out about aspects of the economic life of the locality and of providing possible role models for students. Tony discussed the task with me.

> **Tony:** *Basically it consists of how people made money more or less, how they started off, how their careers got better and stuff like that. I have done about two pages of an essay about a person from my area who has done well in life.*
>
> **Ó Donnabháin:** *And he talked to you freely?*
>
> **Tony:** *He did. I had an interview with him... my father works for him... and I know him fairly well... I had a bit of a chat with him about it...*
>
> **Ó Donnabháin:** *What would you say now would be his secret of success?*
>
> **Tony:** *Using the head ...being quick on the ball. When you look at something look at it in the future. Do not be looking at it in the way it is now. Just keep your mind open and nothing is impossible...*

The interviews with the students suggested that they found the topic interesting but that

they did not have sufficient research skills themselves or sufficient support from their teachers to complete the task satisfactorily. Tony appeared to be the only one to have found a role model as a result of the task.

6.7.4. Outcomes of Work Experience Placements

There were contrasting approaches to work experience placements in the case study schools. In one placements were in the form of two five-day blocks each year. In another placements occurred each Wednesday during the entire year. In a third there was a five-day block placement in one half-year and seven consecutive Fridays in the other half-year. In two of the three schools only one task was completed on work experience placement.

There were great variations in approach to monitoring in the three schools. In Inner-city Girls the co-ordinator personally recruited the employers who were to provide the placements. Each member of the Leaving Certificate Applied teaching team volunteered to visit a small number of students in their workplaces on at least two occasions. The situation was entirely different in Rural Coed. The placement was for one day per week throughout the entire school year. The onus was on the students to find workplaces for themselves. The co-ordinator, who knew the majority of the employers personally, clarified the position regarding insurance issues with the employers, when the student had finalised arrangements for the placement. Subsequently the co-ordinator maintained contact with the employers mainly through phone calls. The employers, who accepted the students on placements, generally employed them on a part-time basis at weekends as well. In Market Town Coed the co-ordinator arranged the placements. Teachers did not visit students in their workplaces, but employers sent confidential written reports to the teachers, who did <u>not</u> discuss the

reports with their students.

There were different approaches to debriefing also. In Inner-city Girls debriefing appeared to consist of students preparing written reports on work experience in the form of responses to set questions prepared by teachers. In Market Town Coed there appeared to be very little emphasis on debriefing other than an informal chat with the co-ordinator. In Rural Coed the teacher, who had worked in industry at an earlier stage of his career, arranged a weekly unstructured discussion with all the students about their experiences in the workplace. In both Market Town Coed and Rural Coed written reports on work experience were only prepared when a task based on work experience was being presented to the external assessor.

Students in different schools appeared to have different emphases in their approach to work experience. The main focus in one appeared to be on establishing a relationship with a particular employer that might lead to a future job. The main focus in another appeared to be on testing their vocational preferences. In the third the focus appeared to be on the strains faced by permanent members of the labour force as well as getting to know a possible future employer.

All the students interviewed said that they had enjoyed work experience placements. Outcomes attributed to work experience placements by students included increased self-confidence, a greater sense of personal responsibility and an increased knowledge of self. The general lack of emphasis on the debriefing stage in all three schools was an indication that work experience was not being integrated in the curriculum but rather was treated as a bolt-on activity. It is revealing that even a teacher in Inner-city Girls who was actively promoting curriculum integration in her Leaving Certificate Applied classes, did not encourage students to link their experiences in the workplace to schoolwork "because we're usually so busy" (Ó Donnabháin

1999:232).

Sheila O'Driscoll, a member of Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service since its inception in 1995 and joint manager since August 1999, expressed surprise and concern at the small number of tasks that were based on work experience throughout the country.

> *It is disappointing that so few tasks are done on work experience if you think of a task as a practical activity, integrating the curriculum. Work experience meets all the other criteria that we apply to a task ... I think there's a fear in teachers' minds in relation to using work experience. They tend to regard it as something apart as opposed to something that is an essential part of the programme*...(Interview 18 August 1999).

6.7.5. Outcomes of Mini-enterprise

The mini-enterprise appeared to have been a source of personal satisfaction to all the interviewees from Inner-city Girls.

> **Eithne:** *I enjoyed the minicompany most. We're making things like frames. Going around showing them to the classes, you feel proud of what you made yourself.*
>
> **Debbie:** *Minicompany is my favourite memory of the whole lot. Yes, we were all working together as a group. I was the assistant sales manager ...we made a profit of £126. I learned how to manage money better ...how to write out receipts...how to make wreaths.*
>
> **Mandy**: *The minicompany gave me great personal enjoyment.*
>
> **Gerri:** *I liked the minicompany task because I was able to do what I wanted to do. I still want to be an accountant.*

They said that it gave them a sense of achievement. It gave them an opportunity to apply skills they had learned to everyday activities. It created a learning environment where they were able to practise a range of collaborative skills such as shared planning, shared decision-making, synchronised time management and shared self-assessment. The mini-enterprise officers also had an opportunity to interact with local executives, whom they could use as role models if they so wished.

6.7.6. Contribution of Cross-curricular Tasks to Employability

In an effort to discover the nature of the contribution that cross-curricular tasks were making to the employability of Leaving Certificate Applied students I conducted a survey of students, teachers, parents and employers regarding employability between December 1996 and February 1997. A set of twenty statements regarding special characteristics that would make people employable was compiled. Fifteen of the statements were adapted from a publication by the Irish Business Enterprise Consortium (IBEC undated). Five additional statements were added as a result of discussions with colleagues from Norway. Four sets of questionnaires were prepared. A questionnaire was targeted at students asking them to identify the five characteristics that they had most developed as a result of participating in cross-curricular tasks. A questionnaire was targeted at teachers asking them to identify the five characteristics that in their opinion students had most developed as a result of participating in cross-curricular tasks. A questionnaire was targeted at employers asking them to identify the five characteristics that "you consider most important for employees in your business". A questionnaire was targeted at parents asking them to identify the five characteristics that "you consider most important for your sons and daughters as they seek employment".

The number of responses were as follows:

Students	72;
Teachers	26;
Employers	41;
Parents	35.

There appeared to be a high level of agreement between students and teachers regarding the characteristics that cross-curricular tasks were helping students to develop. Both groups put the same statements in first and second place. The students perceived cross-curricular tasks as contributing more to their self-confidence than to the development of any particular skills. For example skills as a communicator or skills for a particular job were selected by less than 13% of students. The teacher responses agree with those of the students that the main developments were in the area of personal development.

There also appeared to be a high level of agreement between employers in the catchment areas of the schools and parents of Leaving Certificate Applied students regarding the characteristics sought by employers in their employees and by parents in their sons and daughters as they moved towards the labour market. Furthermore there was a high level of unanimity between the characteristics students believed cross-curricular tasks were helping them to develop and the characteristics employers sought in their employees.

The employers rated social aptitudes more highly than skills for a particular job. They rated technical knowledge skills such as use of computers very lowly i.e. 5% of respondents. The parents put the greatest emphasis on moral qualities such as honesty (80%) and reliability (69%). Table 12 shows a comparison of the responses from the four groups.

Table 12: **Ranking of Statements regarding employability.**

STATEMENTS	Ranking by Students (N=72)	Ranking by Teachers (N=26)	Ranking by Employers (N=41)	Ranking by Parents (N=35)
A person who can act as part of a team.	1st (56%)	1st (61%)	3rd (49%)	6th (37%)*
A person who is reliable.	2nd (54%)	2nd (52%)	1st (69%)	2nd (69%)
A person who is hardworking.	3rd(50%)	8th(30%)*	6th (34%)	4th (41%)
A person who is honest.	4th (49%)	9th (27%)	2nd (63%)	1st (80%)
A person who will take responsibility.	5th (43%)	3rd (43%)	5th (41%)	9th (26%)
A person who does things without having to be told.	6th (38%)	6th(33%)*	4th (44%)	6th(37%)*
A person who is warm/friendly and gets on well with others.	7th(29%)*	6th(33%)*	8th (31%)	3rd (51%)
A person who is interested in a future career.	7th(29%)*	14th(12%)*	12th(10%)*	11th(19%)
A person who is prepared to continue to learn.	9th(21%)*	4th(39%)*	9th (29%)*	8th (29%)
A person who is punctual.	9th(21%)*	14th(12%)*	9th (29%)*	5th(39%)*
A person who is patient.	11th(17%)*	19th(3%)	20th (0)	20th(0).
A person who is prepared to try different activities.	11th (17%)*	12th(21%)*	18th(2%)	13th(10%)*

Continued overleaf

Table 12: (continued) **Ranking of Statements regarding employability.**

A person who cares about the quality of work in progress.	11th (17%)*	4th (39%)*	5th(41%)*	9th(24%)*
A person who is a good communicator.	14th (12%)	10th(21%)*	12th(10%)*	12th(12%)
A person who has a sense of humour.	15th(11%)*	17th(9%)*	16th(5%)*	13th(10%)*
A person who is prepared to try new ways of doing things.	15th(11%)*	10th(21%)*	12th(10%)*	18th(5%)*
A person who has skills for a particular job.	15th(11%)*	12th(18%)*	11th(17%)	13th(10%)*
A person who is able to use a computer effectively.	15th(11%)*	17th(9%)*	16th (5%)*	13th(10%)*
A person who helps to make her/his organisation work well.	19th (8%)	14th(12%)*	15th(8%)	17th(7%).
A person who has formal qualifications.	20th (1%)	20th (0)	18th(2%)*	18th(5%)*

(* denotes tie).

Despite the apparent congruence between what students and teachers perceived as outcomes of cross-curricular tasks and the characteristics that employers sought in their employees the Principal of Market Town Coed expressed his worries regarding the employability of Leaving Certificate Applied students in May 1997.

> *I would like to see a lot more employers accepting the LCA as an acceptable qualification. Those who are now finishing it are hoping that it will be an*

acceptable entry point. It has never been tested before but some of them are quite worried... Certainly the State or semi-state bodies should be encouraged to come out and vote with their feet and say that they would accept them for employment... A lot more people have to come out and give verbal assent by saying yes, we will accept students with the Leaving Certificate Applied into our recruitment programme. I understand that does not mean that they have to keep them. They still have the interview and the ways of selecting afterwards if they like. It would not cost them very much to say that they would accept Leaving Certificate Applied as an entry point and I think that it is vital , absolutely vital that it happens shortly. Otherwise there are a lot of people who will feel seriously disenfranchised throughout the country.

The only significant development regarding public service employers has been the official recognition of Leaving Certificate Applied as one of the criteria for entry to the Gárda Síochána (police force). Speaking at a conference on Inequality in Education in April 1998, Senator Fergal Quinn, the Chairman of the committee established by the Minister for Education and Science to promote general acceptance of Leaving Certificate Applied, accepted the difficulty of changing employers' views (See Section 5.4.7. above). Teachers were disappointed at the lack of progress of the Quinn Committee. In May 1998 teachers were complaining bitterly to me about its ineffectiveness as students were still being asked at interviews What is that? when they referred to their Leaving Certificate Applied qualification.

Figures provided by the case study schools regarding the destination of the students in October 1997 showed that the great majority of the students either went into employment or went on to further education or training (Table 13). There was a slight variation between the returns from individual schools and the returns nationally. While

the percentage of students going on to Further Education is flattering it should be considered in the knowledge that the drop-out rate from Post Leaving Certificate courses by Inner-city Girls students had reached a depressingly high rate by May 1998.

Table 13: **Destination of Leaving Certificate Applied Students in October 1997 four months after completion of course.**

Destination	Market Town Coed	Inner-city Girls	Rural Coed	National (Source: LCA Support Service)
Employment	41%	42%	52%	39%
Post Leaving Certificate FE	37%	38%	33%	33%
Apprentice-Ships	4%	0	0	11%
Farm Management	4%	0	16%	3%
Other courses	11%	0	0	2%
Seeking employment	3%	4%	0	6%
Unknown	0	15%	0	6%

6.8. A Capability to think more Critically

There was a marked difference between the three schools in relation to facilitating young people to increase their capability to think more critically. In two schools inquiry based tasks consisted mainly of exercises that resulted in the gathering of information that was then presented more or less uncritically. The co-ordinator in Rural Coed accepted that he and his colleagues had not addressed tasks in any form of structured approach. The principal of Market Town Coed admitted that he and his colleagues felt inadequate in dealing with inquiry based learning. There were some indications that as a result of cross-curricular tasks some Market Town Coed students had modified their ideas in relation to contemporary issues or even discarded them entirely. For example Mark had changed his opinion of Travellers completely as a result of the inquiry based task he did (see Section 6.9.2.).

In Inner-city Girls there appears to have been a clear progression over the two year period from teacher directed inquiry based assignments to increasingly autonomous investigations conducive to improved conceptualisation and curriculum integration. The teacher of Hotel, Catering and Tourism claimed that by the end of the first year of Leaving Certificate Applied her students were capable of presenting information satisfactorily. She further claimed that the students were capable of analysing information at the end of the two-year period.

> *They certainly improve dramatically from the beginning of the two-year period to the end. I believe myself that analysis is a fairly high-level skill.*

The co-ordinator agreed that students had developed a certain level of analytical skills in he course of the two-year period.

> *I don't know if they all achieve a position where they're able to analyse things to a high level, but I think that they are able to analyse* (Interview May 1997).

The progression was in two clearly defined stages. The first stage appeared to have been dominated by a didactic approach as teachers showed students how to conduct different stages of an inquiry within their limited literacy and oracy skills. The initial tasks were used to introduce the concepts of action planning, formulation of hypotheses and analysis of data at a level students could comprehend. Brainstorming was used as a means of facilitating young people in appreciating that they had ideas of their own that they could formulate as hypotheses to be tested. A particular emphasis was placed on encouraging students, who had learning difficulties, to build their own ideas into cross-curricular tasks. In the first year students appeared to have carried out their tasks under close direction of teachers, who encouraged them to link their tasks to as many modules as possible. Time was invested in enabling students to develop information gathering skills, analysing skills and report writing in order to create a learning environment conducive to facilitating young people to adopt a more integrative approach to learning (See Section 5.5.8. above). Gradually they were given more freedom, until by the middle of the second year some of them were undertaking investigations of local issues of their own choice with little direction from their teachers.

The co-ordinator claimed that the students had matured so much in the final year that they had developed "the skill of integrating other subjects". She claimed that in their tasks students were spontaneously practising functional integration in combining the various skills they had learned over the years to create new knowledge for themselves.

> *You see in the final year they can draw from the experience they've had from every subject. The skills that they've learned from every subject unconsciously in their minds are pooled. They pull the skills from the various subjects all*

together - all the things that they've learned from the various subjects, unconsciously - you know. They don't break down the skills in their mind. They have the skill of integrating other subjects by the time they get to 6th year. Those skills they pool them all and you can ask them what topic do they want to do and they'll say 'Well, this is what I want to do, and THIS is how I'm going to go about it now'. And they'll tell you avenues that you wouldn't even have thought of...

The teacher with responsibility for Hotel, Catering and Tourism at Inner-city Girls believed that the integration came spontaneously from the students rather than being mediated through the teachers.

I think quite honestly integration happens not by accident but through the kids... one of the central ideas of this course seems to be cross-curricular integration, and that's not possible unless the teachers are given the time to co-operate with each other and plan it really. I was going to say that it doesn't happen by accident - it does happen by accident in actual fact, but that's not the way it should happen, I think - it should be planned, it should be more professional.

I asked the teacher with responsibility for Hotel Catering and Tourism if she thought that the tasks helped students to learn how to learn.

Well, I suppose it depends what you mean by "learning". Because traditional learning they certainly don't do. But they learn how to gather information. I notice that most students, who come in to LCA do not know how to use an index in a book. In fact I don't think that they even know that an index exists. And that certainly limits them. They can't even look up a recipe when they don't know what an index is. They learn a lot and they learn it without even knowing that they're learning. So it would be untraditional learning but I think a lot of it goes

on.

Her reply raises serious questions regarding the quality of previous learning of underachieving students in Inner-city Girls. Unfortunately I was unable to do a cross-check with the position in the other two case study schools as I did not put a similar question to any of the teachers from the two schools.

The differences in approach to curriculum integration in the case study schools appeared to have been mirrored nationally. The reports of the Chief Examiner in 1996 and 1997 indicated a similar unevenness in approach.

> *The degree and effectiveness of curriculum integration displayed in tasks varied greatly. Some candidates seemed totally unaware of the requirement for integration in the task and made little or no effort to achieve it. In a number of instances where it was addressed, it was found to be contrived and/or superficial* (Chief Examiner 1996:11).
>
> *Curriculum integration continues in many instances to be contrived rather than substantive, resulting in low scoring for candidates* (Chief Examiner 1997:15).

In all three schools the extent to which tasks relating to work experience placements enabled young people to interrogate work practices in the local economy was limited for two reasons. The majority of placements were located in workplaces of low-level skills that did not reflect the current technological changes in industry. The lack of emphasis on debriefing did not give students an opportunity of learning from their own personal experiences through reflection and analysis. There were indications that teachers tended to regard work experience as a bolt-on component rather than an integrated component of the curriculum. However the students were very positive about work experience placements. They commented on their enjoyment of the

placements, their increased self-confidence, their increased awareness of different aspects of working life and of future job opportunities. Students' experiences in part-time jobs were not availed of as a source of experiential learning in any of the schools.

In one school mini-enterprises, supported by local employers as consultants, provided an opportunity for young people to role-play the process of job application and the different stages of producing and marketing a product. A mini-enterprise in which participants followed an action plan appeared to have provided an effective framework for personal reflection and self-analysis. Students expressed a great sense of satisfaction in participating in mini-enterprises. Some of the participants in the mini-enterprise had an opportunity of discussing with business executives the manner in which local enterprises were organised and the different roles that people had to play in them. They do not appear to have been facilitated in analysing the information gained and formulating critical opinions of specific occupations in the locality.

The approach to career planning was rather superficial. There was not any evidence of rigorous cross-checking of the accuracy of information being gathered in the case of two schools. There were indications in all three schools that at the end of the course many students went to low skilled jobs well below their ability levels.

6.9. Greater Sense of Community

6.9.1. Interaction with Employers

While employers supported schools by providing places for work experience and consultants on mini-enterprises, they also provided students with an opportunity to gain a perspective on the economic life of the local community. A series of tasks focusing on successful entrepreneurs in the locality of the school had the possibility of increasing the awareness of students of ways in which people had based their businesses on the

natural resources of the area. Studies by mini-enterprise executives of their counterparts in real life provided students with opportunities of studying careers that were being developed within their own localities. Both exercises provided students with role models that may help them in developing their own careers within their own community. Opportunities were not capitalised on because of a reluctance on the part of teachers to promote experiential learning.

I only became aware of one attempt to reflect technologies being used in local industries in the kind of tasks that students were undertaking. The Technology teacher at Market Town Coed was deliberately encouraging students to reflect technologies in use locally in their tasks in an effort to improve their employability.

> *I'd be more thinking of the employability of the young people. In Technology ... we chose projects that were related to industry, local industry. One of the modules was the change of state technology. That was ideal from our point of view, for example vehicle repair. And there is a local industry... it is a change of state technology ...from a liquid to a solid state. So we more or less geared the task to what their employability requirements would be afterwards. Because these lads ultimately will have to go out and get jobs but also there is an element of learning something that will be useful later on. It doesn't matter whether it will be used in a particular job or not.*

He stressed the importance of being skilled in certain technologies as a part of one's personal effectiveness altogether unrelated from employability issues.

> *If when you're driving the car in the gate you scratch the side of it, you have two choices. You can take it to the local garage man who will charge an arm and a leg for doing it or if you have the skills for it you may opt to try it for yourself.*

The teacher was pleased that local employers had reacted positively to what the students had been doing.

> *We had done some fibre glass work and that went down very well because the employers were seeing that what we were doing was in a lot of respects directly related to what they would want. We took the students on tours around the local areas into the various factories. At the question and answer sessions at the end of the tour the employers were quite impressed by them. They'd see no difficulty in employing these lads possibly starting off as a workshop hand or a floor operative but eventually there would be no problem for a lot of them working their way up the line.*

6.9.2. Awareness of Contemporary Issues

Students appeared to have developed a greater awareness of contemporary issues at both local and global levels. In Market Town Coed some students were investigating global issues such as international human rights and world hunger while others were investigating local issues such as migrant families ('travellers') and drug addiction. Peter described his feelings of solidarity with victims of torture world-wide.

> *...I think it's terrible the way that people have been tortured or imprisoned for no reason whatsoever except for being black or being male or female or of whatever nationality...*

As part of the same task, which Angela did in collaboration with Peter, she asked local business people to provide prizes for a raffle in support of Amnesty International. She was pleasantly surprised at the solidarity shown by adults.

> *We went to the local shops and we asked them to donate prizes. The prizes were a box of biscuits, a box of Taytos, tee shirts, scarves, gloves, and two vouchers. .*

We were amazed at the positive response that we got from the shops.

As a result of his Leaving Certificate Applied task Peter showed a greater feeling of significance by contemplating becoming a member of Amnesty International.

At the local level both Mark and Flo were involved in separate tasks in relation to Travellers. It apparently gave them an opportunity to reflect on the interactions of different groups within a social system. Mark admitted that the task had changed his opinion of Travellers.

Twelve months ago I'd say, 'Oh they are knackers. Good for nothing, they'd rob you'.

He had developed an entirely different view as a result of his task.

They are the very same as everyone else ...they have their good points they have their bad points ...it's just that a lot of people misjudge them. There are bad families and good families.

He displayed an understanding of the injustice of sweeping generalisations.

Maybe two or three good families come into town and they could be parked down the road there and everything would be quite all right. A bad family may then come in and park across the road from them and might destroy the place with rubbish and litter and rob a few houses. Then everyone has a bad image of Travellers.

Instead of dismissing all travellers in a negative manner, he now felt that they were entitled to respect.

There should be more respect for them.

Not only was he thinking that travellers had a right to a proper site, but he was beginning to question actions by the local authority.

They should get somewhere to stay, a proper site. There was a site, but the

council blocked it up. I don't know why. It's blocked up for the last two years...

Flo said that she had chosen to do the task on Travellers as she wished "to see what they were really like". She had an opportunity of seeing at first hand the conditions under which they were living.

We took a few photos of them and the places where they were living and where they used to live first. They got thrown out of it because the place was really dirty. We got to see the toilets where they used to wash themselves, and the little tap where they used to drink.

She showed an awareness of the manner in which travellers were forced to move by the settled community when they caused excessive pollution

Then they moved up by the graveyard when they were run out.

So we were up there talking to them.

They investigated the schooling that was being provided for young travellers from preschool age to late teens.

We went down to Sister XXXX in the school and we were talking to Travellers there. We were talking to the little ones in the play school.

We went to the special school where they can go in off the street to play pool and watch videos and things like that. They can also learn how to cook. There were a few girls there making salads while we were there.

They had a conversation with older teenage Travellers who talked to them about the dialect that travellers use.

They were about twenty and eighteen.They were talking to us and they were saying some of the words that they use, their own talk, their own language and then they'd transfer back to our words. I could not understand them at all...

Flo appeared to have developed a balanced view of Travellers after completing the task.

She was aware of the injustices, which they have to suffer from some members of the settled community, but she had no illusions about the difficulties that some unruly Traveller children could create for shopkeepers.

> *In some pubs they are treated as scum of the earth and I don't think that's right. But you know some of the Traveller children are very bold...*

The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls said that the students had responded positively to investigations that related to their day-to-day lives.

> *If it's personally affecting them like the tasks they did on helping agencies in their community. They absolutely loved those. They all had experiences in their families in which those agencies could have helped.*

She felt that the students had gained an increased awareness of the social problems existing in their own locality and had enabled them to bring a lot of life experiences to the class that they were discouraged from discussing at home. She indicated that she had used cross-curricular tasks, relating to social issues, effectively as a basis for experiential learning.

> *If they can be listened to in class they can bring a lot of life experiences to the class and they can actually help other people in the class as well.*

She appeared to be exploring ways of giving students a greater feeling of significance by making the information they were collecting from primary sources about social services in the locality available to the relevant authority.

> *... the facts and figures that they came up with on unmarried mothers, deserted wives, surely some agency could use that information? Could the Health Board use it?*

One task directly involved the Inner-city Girls students in contributing to a community service in the form of a guided tour of the locality for disadvantaged parents as part of

the Home/School/Community liaison service. Some tasks had helped to increase students' general information about the locality in which they lived. Lucy was disappointed in her task in that she was unable to find much information but Joan's experience was quite different.

> *I would not have known much about my own place last year but now I know a lot.*

The response of the general public to the students' investigations appeared to have been quite positive. The co-ordinator at Inner-city Girls said that the students' own feelings of solidarity with their neighbours appeared to be a source of strength to them as they went about their tasks.

> *People in their own local community are very important to them - people around where they live - especially in the careers task and in the Health Education task. They don't seem inhibited about asking their neighbour a question whereas going into a big office they'd find terrifying. A lot of them use their own local neighbourhood to source their information.*

Peter (Market Town Coed) was confident that the local people would be supportive of Leaving Certificate Applied students in the future.

> *Students who will be doing this course in the future will get a great response from the people of the town.*

Cross-curricular tasks regarding contemporary issues appeared to have given students an opportunity to increase their sense of community by making them aware of a range of values relating to life, liberty and love in an implicit rather than an explicit manner

6.9.3. Non-involvement of Parents

An opportunity to emphasise the role of the family in education was lost as none of the three case study schools involved parents in tasks. There were indications that parents

of Market Town Coed students were not only positively disposed to the programme but also interested in the tasks.

Flo: *My mother loves it. She thinks it is a great course.*

Matthew: *My parents think it's good all right. I tell them about the tasks I'm doing.*

Mark: *My mother is thrilled with it. I talk to my mother about the exams and the tasks. I don't know about my father. I don't talk much to him.*

Peter: *My parents were delighted that I was doing something like the task on Amnesty International.*

Despite the positive reactions from parents via the students neither the Principal nor the teachers in Market Town Coed involved the parents in the tasks.

Ó Donnabháin: *To what extent are the parents involved in the Task?*

Principal of Market Town Coed: *To my knowledge not greatly. We have had information nights about the Leaving Certificate Applied. Yet many parents would be extremely vague as to what the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, its structure, really is.*

The co-ordinator agreed.

Ó Donnabháin: *Do the students involve their parents at all in the tasks?*

Co-ordinator: *Not very much.*

The Mathematics/ICT teacher did not appear to have thought of involving the parents

Ó Donnabháin: *What about parents? Have you had any involvement with parents in the task?*

Mathematics/ICT teacher: *Not really, no...no I wouldn't have, no.*

The parents of students in Inner-city Girls did not appear to have much involvement in tasks either.

Ó Donnabháin: *Do the parents become involved in the tasks at all?*

Teacher of English/Communications: *You don't see very many of them really when we have meetings - some of them come in, some don't.*

The teacher of German appeared to have been the only teacher that involved a parent in a task and that was quite limited.

Ó Donnabháin: *Did the parents become involved in your task at all?*

Teacher of German: *Not directly. One of the girls was doing a task on Germany and her father had worked in Germany so in that respect he was involved. But other than that, no.*

Unfortunately I did not ask the students at Inner-city Girls what their parents thought of the course. Only two students from Rural Coed commented on their parents' reaction to the course. Aidan said that his parents did not know enough about the course to comment. Nora said:

As long as I'm happy, my mother is delighted with it. I'm getting on grand and she thinks it's good,

The co-ordinator described the limited nature of the involvement of parents in Leaving Certificate Applied at Rural Coed.

When the students choose LCA all parents are invited in and we have an exploratory night with them. The only time I would have met parents is when they would have come to the school on the exploratory night and on an open day. We have made it clear that all parents are very welcome on an open day for any particular year group. And we find the response from that is very good.

It was regrettable that all three schools failed to involve parents in the learning

relationships, which they were endeavouring to develop between students and other adults in the local community.

6.10. Summary

Eight perceived consequences of strategies related to cross-curricular tasks in the case study schools were enhanced self-esteem, increased motivation, improved communications skills, improved self-organisational skills, increased ability to work as part of a team, increased employability, a greater sense of community and a capability to think more critically.

All the students, who were interviewed, stated that their self-confidence had grown as a result of cross-curricular tasks. Many of their teachers agreed with them. The strategy that was identified most often by them as a source of self-confidence was the interaction between students and adults with whom they had established a learning relationship in the course of inquiry based tasks. The sense of achievement in completing tasks within specific deadlines was a further boost to their self-confidence. The more adult student/teacher relationships that appear to have developed spontaneously in the course of tasks in two schools also contributed significantly to an enhanced self-image for students. The sensitive approach of the majority of the external assessors of cross-curricular tasks was a major source of affirmation for students. While all students increased in self-confidence the degree of enhancement of self-esteem varied in accordance with the extent to which they were facilitated and encouraged to develop self-assessment skills. Students in one school appeared to have been effectively introduced to self-assessment. Teachers in the second school were diffident about their own capability to facilitate students in self-assessment. The co-ordinator in the third school said that he was opposed to self-assessment as he

considered it to be unfair to ask young people to look critically at their own work.

The increased self-confidence appeared to be reflected in the increased motivation displayed by students. Cross-curricular tasks appeared to increase students' motivation in that they were perceived by students generally as short-term achievable goals. Another general source of motivation was the accumulation of credits on a regular basis. Students from one case study school appeared to have been particularly motivated by the gradually increased amount of personal control they were given over the management of tasks.

Cross-curricular tasks helped to create a greater awareness among teachers of the deficits in literacy skills of students, which are a major obstacle to the future progress of many participants in Leaving Certificate Applied. In one school there were two examples of cross-curricular tasks causing students with very poor literacy skills to leave school altogether. On the other hand teachers in the three case study schools credited cross-curricular tasks with being responsible for significant progress made by some Leaving Certificate Applied students, who had serious deficits in basic literacy skills. In two schools students used cross-curricular tasks as a means of applying the skills they were learning in Information Communications Technology modules. Some students practised higher-level literacy skills as they prepared analytic reports on information they had gathered and formulated generalisations.

The possibilities of facilitating the development of students' self-organisational skills such as planning, decision-making and time management in cross-curricular tasks were only availed of in one school. In the other two schools the reluctance of teachers to give students any significant degree of control over the selection of topics inhibited them from practising self-organisational skills to the same extent as their counterparts in the third school, who took an increasing amount of personal ownership of and personal

responsibility for their own tasks.

There appeared to be general agreement between students and teachers that the students' ability to work as part of a team was one of the main outcomes of cross-curricular tasks. A majority of teachers expressed reluctance to become involved in group tasks. The teachers claimed that students did not like them but the interviews showed that the students appeared to have enjoyed them. It appeared that the teachers were using students as an alibi for their own reluctance to make the required changes in their methodology. A major obstacle to group tasks was the lack of regular meetings of the teaching team, which could improve the flow of information regarding positive collaborative student activities among individual teachers.

The consequences of cross-curricular tasks in relation to employability are difficult to decipher. The majority of students appeared to have formulated realistic coherent career plans but a question was raised by the joint director of Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service about the accuracy of information available to students. In one school, where there was not a counsellor on the staff, there was not any evidence of a check being made on the veracity of the career information that students were providing to other students in the course of a task. There appeared to be both positive and negative consequences to work experience placements. On the negative side the neglect of a reflective approach to work experience meant that students did not interrogate work practices in the local economy that is changing rapidly due to the volatility of the global market and the unrelenting speed of technological advances. The reluctance of teachers to encourage/facilitate students to link their experiences in the workplace with modules studied or being studied resulted in work experience placements being a 'bolt-on' addition rather than an integral part of the curriculum. On the positive side students appeared to have been greatly motivated by their placements,

which they claimed to have enjoyed very much. They also appeared to have used placements as a means of contacting possible future employers and in some cases anticipating the demands certain occupations made on the persons involved in them. There appeared to be a high level of agreement between students and teachers regarding the contribution of cross-curricular tasks to the development of specific personal characteristics conducive to a person's employability.

There were clear differences in the quality of approach in the schools to facilitating young people to think more critically. Only one school had effectively used inquiry based tasks to create the type of learning environment conducive to developing competencies relating to conceptualisation and integration with prior knowledge. In all three schools the interrogation of workplaces in the locality appeared to be rather superficial due to the lack of teacher expertise in managing experience based learning. A neglect of debriefing resulted in an over-concentration on concrete experiences to the neglect of the other elements of experiential learning (see Section 4.5.3. above).

Two schools appeared to have used cross-curricular tasks relating to contemporary issues effectively in facilitating students to develop a greater sense of community. The opportunities for students to develop better insights into the economic life of the relevant local communities from work experience placements or from studies of local entrepreneurs were not capitalised on by the teachers. While inquiry based tasks appeared to have given the young people concerned a greater awareness of community issues both local and global, the work experience based tasks appeared to have been particularly lacking in reflective observation and abstract rationalisation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Empowering Dimensions of Cross-curricular Tasks

Cross-curricular tasks were introduced primarily to counteract the dangers of fragmentation in a modular initial vocational curriculum. This case study, based on the initial two years of Leaving Certificate Applied (1995-1997), has provided evidence that it is possible to organise cross-curricular tasks not only to counteract fragmentation but even more importantly to make a significant contribution to the empowerment of the participants provided certain conditions are met. In this chapter I compare the three case study schools in the context of my theoretical assumptions regarding the potential impact of cross-curricular tasks on students' personal effectiveness, on their capability to think more critically and on their sense of community (see Chapter 4. above). I then consider the implications of the findings of the case study in relation to educational leadership, pedagogy, assessment procedures and certification.

7.2. Personal Effectiveness

7.2.1. Differing Consequences of Cross-curricular tasks in relation to Self-esteem

A consideration of the self-esteem related consequences of cross-curricular tasks in the context of my theoretical assumptions (Section 4.3.4.) shows major differences between contextual conditions in the three case study schools. My assumptions suggested a four-part question regarding the impact of cross-curricular tasks on the self-esteem of the participants.

To what extent did cross-curricular tasks contribute to

- improving the quality of student/teacher relationships?
- facilitating students to take greater responsibility for their own work?
- enabling students to relate better to people of all ages?
- enabling students to practise self-appraisal skills?

Both students and teachers in Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed agreed that cross-curricular tasks had caused a significant improvement in student/teacher relationships. While students in Rural Coed did not perceive any change in the quality of student/teacher relationships, their teachers felt that there had been deterioration.

Teachers in Inner-city Girls had a deliberate policy of encouraging students to take an increasingly proactive role in the management of cross-curricular tasks. Students welcomed the freedom to choose topics in which they were personally interested. In both Market Town Coed and Rural Coed teachers maintained control of selecting topics for tasks. There was a marked similarity between tasks completed by students from Rural Coed. The Market Town Coed co-ordinator

imposed a system of staggered deadlines, which precluded students from any flexibility in time management in relation to cross-curricular tasks. The Inner-city Girls co-ordinator claimed that her students were taking almost complete responsibility for planning and implementing their cross-curricular tasks during the second half of the second year of Leaving Certificate Applied. There was not any evidence of a similar development in either Rural Coed or Market Town Coed.

Both students and teachers from all three schools agreed that inquiry based tasks had enabled students to improve their social skills through having to communicate particularly with adults whom they had not previously known. They all agreed that cross-curricular tasks had made a significant contribution to students' self-confidence.

There were clear differences between the three case study schools in relation to self-assessment. The Rural Coed co-ordinator was opposed in principle to self-assessment. He maintained that it was unfair to ask students, who had great difficulty in completing a task, to criticise it subsequently. Consequently he discouraged his colleagues from facilitating students in assessing their own work. The teachers in Market Town Coed encouraged their students to practise self-assessment, but they confessed that they were not very skilled in doing so. Teachers in Inner-city Girls were very committed to student self-assessment. They claimed that the students had become proficient in carrying out self-assessment of cross-curricular tasks by the second year of Leaving Certificate Applied.

In summary it appeared that cross-curricular tasks had made a significant contribution

- to enhancing students' feelings based on informed self-evaluation in Inner-city Girls;

- to improving student/teacher interactions leading to increased students' self-confidence in Market Town Coed and
- to increasing students' self-confidence without improving student/teacher relations in Rural Coed.

7.2.2. Conditions affecting impact of Cross-curricular tasks on Self-esteem

The principal conditions affecting the positive impact of cross-curricular tasks on the self-esteem of students were the wide ranges of self-image of students on entry to Leaving Certificate Applied, ethos of school, leadership styles of principal and teaching team co-ordinator, student/teacher relationships, expertise of teachers in facilitating students to take a more proactive role in learning, quality of school links with other social systems and attitudes to assessment.

A significant number of participants in Leaving Certificate Applied had very low levels of self-esteem on entry to the programme. The factors that had undermined their self-confidence and deflated their self-image appeared to have been negative experiences in school previously, poor examinations results, an awareness of their deficiency in literacy skills and an inability to converse with adults. Inner-city Girls was a single sex school, while the two other schools were co-educational with a large majority of males in Leaving Certificate Applied class group. The literacy deficits of Leaving Certificate Applied students in both Market Town Coed and Rural Coed were more serious than in Inner-city Girls.
The percentage of students with an age norm of 10 or less in each school shows the extent of difference.

Table 14: **Percentage of LCA students with age norm of 10 or less.**

SCHOOL	Percentage with age norm of 10 or less
Market Town Coed	25%
Rural Coed	22%
Inner-city Girls	4%

Feeling accepted as part of the whole student population of their school, mingling with other students and being encouraged to participate in all aspects of student life appeared to have been a positive factor. Being more or less isolated from the rest of the school had a negative effect. The personal interest displayed by the principal and by the course co-ordinator in individual student's cross-curricular tasks together with their flexibility regarding students working on tasks outside the school appeared to have been a source of great encouragement. The improved relationships that developed from student/teacher interactions in relation to inquiry-based cross-curricular tasks appeared to have led to a significant increase in the self-confidence of the young people involved. When the improved student/teacher relationship was marked by students taking a more proactive role in the management of cross-curricular tasks it was particularly significant. Another source of self-confidence was communicating with adults other than teachers in the course of investigating topics both local and global. The young people, who were interviewed, generally identified participation in work experience placements as a source of increased self-confidence. Students, who took part in a mini-enterprise, said that it was an enjoyable worthwhile experience that gave them a sense of achievement.

A critical condition affecting the impact of cross-curricular tasks on the

self-esteem of students related to the extent to which formative evaluation was addressed and combined sensitively with the development of student self-assessment procedures. It made the crucial difference in terms of empowerment between uncritical self-image and self-esteem informed by critical self-appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses.

7.2.3. Differing consequences of Cross-curricular Tasks in relation Employability

A consideration of the employability related consequences of cross-curricular tasks in the context of my theoretical assumptions (Section 4.4.6.) shows major weaknesses in the three case study schools. My assumptions suggested a five-part question regarding the impact of cross-curricular tasks on the employability of the participants.

Did cross-curricular tasks contribute to participants:

- Improving literacy, numeracy and ICT skills?
- Improving self-organisational skills?
- Developing collaborative skills necessary for working as part of team;
- Developing self-appraisal skills to assess realistically her/his existing and potential capabilities in the context of a rapidly changing economic environment?
- Developing reflective observation and abstract rationalisation skills necessary to interrogate contemporary workplaces and work practices?

The research showed that the great majority of Leaving Certificate Applied students in the three case study schools had serious literacy deficits. While the average chronological age of the 69 students was 17 years and 4 months, only one achieved an age norm of 17 on Atwell & Wells Wide Range Vocabulary test. 74%

of those tested had an age norm of 13 or less and 38% had an age norm of 11 or less. There is conflicting evidence regarding the contribution that cross-curricular tasks made to the literacy skills of participants. A survey (Table 12) of students, teachers, employers and parents showed that only a minority of students (10%) and of teachers (20%) attributed improved communications skills to cross-curricular tasks. On the other hand the interviews showed that both students and teachers agreed that tasks had given students an opportunity to practise a range of oracy and literacy skills as they gathered information from a variety of sources and presented it either in print or in graphical form. Teachers in the three schools were very definite that cross-curricular tasks had helped students to improve their literacy skills. Cross-curricular tasks also appeared to have created a greater awareness among teachers regarding the literacy problems that students had. In Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed cross-curricular tasks appeared to have provided opportunities for students to apply a range of skills they were acquiring in the Information Communication Technology modules. In Rural Coed school students were not given an opportunity to practise ICT skills after completing introductory modules.

Inner-city Girls appeared to have facilitated students in developing and applying empowering self-organisational skills such as planning, decision-making, time management and self-assessment through giving them increased responsibility for the management of cross-curricular tasks. Students' increased freedom was counterbalanced by an increased emphasis by teachers on formative assessment and self-assessment procedures. Teachers in the other two schools admitted that they felt inadequate in facilitating students in developing self-organisational skills.

Students and teachers in the three schools agreed that an increased ability on the part of students 'to act as part of a team' was one of the main outcomes of cross-curricular tasks. Students appeared to enjoy collaborative work. The majority of teachers in the three schools appeared to be reluctant to organise group tasks. Meetings of the Leaving Certificate Applied teaching teams were not organised regularly in any of the three schools. There was a sense of cohesion in the teaching teams in Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed due to the school ethos, the sense of camaraderie in the staff and the leadership of both principal and co-ordinator in each school. In Rural Coed there was a lack of cohesion in the teaching team as the entire responsibility for Leaving Certificate Applied appeared to have been left to the co-ordinator.

In Market Town Coed and Rural Coed tasks appeared to have been based on the initial work experience placements and not on the later ones. In Inner-city Girls students completed tasks on all work experience placements. In all the schools students used placements as a means of helping themselves with career planning. In Rural Coed there appeared to be a considerable emphasis on career planning as there was a guidance counsellor on the teaching team. In the three schools work experience based tasks were not really cross-curricular as they were essentially 'bolt-on' activities that put the entire emphasis on the concrete experience. Any other learning that resulted from work experience appeared to have been coincidental. While placements appeared to have given students an opportunity to experience work in different locations, the range of experiences provided was quite narrow as the great majority of the jobs experienced were of the low skill variety. Experience based tasks did not facilitate students in interrogating contemporary workplaces and work practices to any extent as the lack of emphasis

on debriefing resulted in the neglect of the reflective observation and rational abstraction elements of the experiential learning process (see Section 4.5.3. above).

7.2.4. Conditions affecting impact of Cross-curricular tasks on Employability

A major condition affecting the impact of cross-curricular tasks on employability was the attitude of teachers to experience based tasks. At the start of the 21st century a certain specialised expertise, supplemented by communications skills, self-organisational skills and a capability to work as part of a team, is not sufficient to equip a young person to manage her/his employability. It is also necessary to gain an increasing understanding of the complexity and volatility of the world of work through interrogating contemporary workplaces and work practices on the basis of reflective observation. In the three schools teachers appeared to regard tasks related to work experience as something apart that was unrelated to what they were doing with students in class in accordance with clearly defined rules of 'recognition' and 'realisation' (Bernstein 1990). Teachers also showed a lack of awareness of different elements of experiential learning such as active experimentation, reflective observation and abstract rationalisation (Kolb 1993). There was very little emphasis on debriefing with the result that students were not facilitated in reflecting on issues relating to the world of work in the context of their experiences and given an opportunity to analyse them. Students' opportunities to interrogate contemporary work practices were constrained by the majority of placements being in relation to low-skilled, gender-stereotypical jobs that provided an obsolescent image of a modern work place. The mini-enterprise appeared to have been an effective strategy for enabling students improve specific skills, collaborate with others in a team situation and evaluate a personal

contribution to a common undertaking. It seemed to meet criteria for developing enterprising characteristics and attitudes as expounded by Gibb (1993), but it did not address any of the alternative views on enterprise raised by Coffield (1990). Debriefing was not carried out adequately either in relation to work experience placements or mini-enterprise. It is very difficult for young people to begin to manage their own employability if they are not facilitated to think critically about the world of work (Trant and O Donnabhain 1998).

A second condition was the high incidence of low levels of literacy skills in the group of young people from the case study schools who took Leaving Certificate Applied in 1995-1997. Teachers from the three schools agreed in the interviews that cross-curricular tasks provided a non-threatening setting in which the great majority of young people addressed their literacy problems effectively. On the other hand there were two examples of people dropping out of school altogether as tasks exposed the extremely low level of their literacy skills. Cross-curricular tasks provided an opportunity for students to apply information communication technology (ICT) skills in a meaningful way when given access to computers at appropriate times.

A third condition was the lack of emphasis by representatives of employers, with whom students were in contact, on the importance of communication skills for employability. The survey (Table 12) showed that only 10% of the representatives of local employers listed good communications skills and only 5% of them considered the ability to use a computer effectively among the five characteristics they considered most important for employees in their businesses. This suggests that the representatives of the employers in question were dealing mainly in products and services that required a low skilled workforce. On the other

hand they may have been influenced by the low skilled nature of the work experience placements that they were providing for Leaving Certificate Applied students. It may also reflect the disturbing finding in the most recent International Adult Literacy Survey that many Irish middle managers, who had relatively low literacy levels, did not consider that they could be constrained from promotion in their workplace because of their literacy levels (Morgan et al. 1997; OECD 2000).

The fourth condition was the level of control over the management of tasks that teachers were prepared to give to students. Where students were facilitated in negotiating more control for themselves in the selection and management of tasks, there appeared to have been a marked increase in self-organisational skills. Where teachers attempted to retain more or less full control over the management of tasks students made little progress in the development of self-organisational skills.

The fifth condition related to the extent that teachers were willing to promote group tasks. In the survey both students and teachers agreed that the capability that students had most developed through cross-curricular tasks was being able to act as part of a team. The interviews showed that while students generally enjoyed group tasks, many teachers were reluctant to continue organising them. They claimed that students did not want to do them. The interviews showed that it was the teachers themselves who did not want to do them as they found them to be more difficult to organise than individualised tasks. A further disincentive for teachers was the difficulties teachers appeared to have in facilitating students in identifying individual contributions to group tasks for the purpose of summative assessment. The reluctance of teachers to become involved in group tasks could be a serious constraint on the development of young people's collaborative skills that are an essential element of personal effectiveness.

The major condition relating to the employability of Leaving Certificate Applied students related to the currency of the certification on the labour market. The chairman of the national steering committee, set up by the Minister for Education to promote the certificate as an entry qualification to the labour market, described the great difficulty he experienced in trying to get fellow employers to consider any qualification other than the Leaving Certificate. The principal of Market Town Coed, who had established a good working relationship with local employers, reported the same difficulty.

7.3. Capacity to think more critically

7.3.1. Differing Consequences of Cross-curricular tasks in relation to promoting students' capacity to think more critically

A consideration of the consequences of cross-curricular tasks shows major differences between contextual conditions in the three case study schools in relation to enabling students to think more critically. My assumptions (Section 4.5.6.) suggested the following nine-part question regarding the impact of cross-curricular tasks on the participants' capability to think for themselves.

To what extent did cross-curricular tasks contribute to:

- Enabling participants to think critically at whatever level of sophistication they are;
- Encouraging participants to use reading and writing to develop modes of thought;
- Enabling participants to interrogate contemporary issues with particular reference to moral and ethical issues;

- Improving participants' capacity to conceptualise through practising fact-finding, interpretation of findings, reflection, analysis and synthesis in the form of key concepts;
- Integrating what they are learning from different cross-curricular tasks with prior learning by modifying existing ideas or discarding them;
- Learning about the contemporary economic environment by consciously engaging with work experiences through reflection;
- Self-assessment of theoretical and experiential learning by clearly defined criteria;
- By teachers moving from a mainly instructional mode to a more facilitative mode of teaching;
- Encouraging increased collaboration between teachers of different specialisms.

There was a deliberate attempt in only one school to encourage each individual to appreciate that s/he had ideas of her/his own and that s/he could build on them. Two schools used cross-curricular tasks effectively to facilitate students in expressing their thoughts about contemporary issues that they were investigating. Students used cross-curricular tasks to investigate both local and global contemporary issues at different levels of depth. There did not appear to be an explicit emphasis on moral or ethical questions. There were major differences between the schools in relation to encouraging and facilitating students to think more critically. In one there was a clear policy of using cross-curricular tasks to facilitate students in improving their capacity to conceptualise and to integrate what they were learning from tasks with prior learning. In the second while the main emphasis had been on improving communication skills through gathering

information and presenting it uncritically, there were indications that some students had modified their existing ideas in the course of completing specific tasks. Teachers in the third school appeared to have concentrated on using tasks as a means of facilitating students to improve their basic literacy skills while neglecting to facilitate students in using the same literacy skills to clarify their own personal opinions and feelings in any depth.

The neglect of reflective observation and abstract rationalisation in relation to work experience in all three schools resulted in all the students involved missing an opportunity to explore future career plans in more depth and to interrogate critically the volatile economic environment in which they were living. The consequences of the different approaches to formative assessment and self-assessment ranged from uncritical self-confidence to critical self-esteem. The lack of precise criteria in relation to the assessment of integrated learning by the Department of Education and Science resulted in confusion among teachers.

7.3.2. Conditions affecting impact of Cross-curricular tasks on Students' capability to think more critically

The main condition affecting the impact of cross-curricular tasks on students' capability to think for themselves was the willingness and the ability of teachers to change from a mainly instructional mode to a more facilitative mode of teaching. The change involved a move from a style of teaching where the teacher explained specific principles that students then learned to apply to particular situations to a style of teaching that facilitated students in exploring particular situations with a view to adapting or discarding their own ideas. In the former the teacher was in

control, actively instructing and the student was learning through carrying out assignments that s/he was told to do. In the latter teachers worked in teams in facilitating individual students to take an increasing amount of control over her/his own learning with a growing emphasis on self-assessment. Conditions supportive of the change in mode of teaching were the ethos of the school, the leadership of the principal and co-ordinator and the sense of a learning community shared by the teaching staff. A negative condition was the unwillingness or inability of teachers to become involved in facilitating students in learning from work experience.

7.4. Greater Sense of Community

7.4.1. Differing Consequences of Cross-curricular tasks in relation to promoting a sense of community

A consideration of the consequences of cross-curricular tasks in the context of my theoretical assumptions (Section 4.5.) shows major differences between contextual conditions in the three case study schools in relation to enabling students to develop a greater sense of community. My assumptions prompted questions regarding the impact of cross-curricular tasks on the participants' feelings of security, significance and solidarity (see Section 4.6.5.).

Both Inner-city Girls and Market Town Coed used cross-curricular tasks effectively to develop Leaving Certificate Applied class groups as distinct miniature communities within their schools. The defining characteristics of the two miniature communities, in the opinion of the students involved, were affirmation of human worth, inclusiveness, collaboration between students and teachers and in the case of Inner-city Girls a proactive role in decision making.

Both miniature communities could not have developed without the ethos of each school and the enlightened leadership of principals, co-ordinators and teachers involved. In both schools the concept of community was being promoted in the manner in which the Leaving Certificate Applied class group was being developed with increased mutual respect between students and teachers leading to a greater sense of interdependence. In both the medium was the message as students and teachers appeared to be learning experientially how to promote a sense of community within the class-group simply by living it. Teachers appeared to be learning skills of negotiation and affirmation while students learned skills necessary for collaborative effectiveness and critical thinking albeit at different rates in the two schools. While the Leaving Certificate Applied class in Rural Coed had coalesced into a cohesive group around the co-ordinator there was not any sense of learning community involving other teachers as in the other two schools.

Cross-curricular tasks did not encourage the development of learning relationships between students and their parents and did not increase students' awareness of the contribution they could make to their own families, as parents were not involved in any way in any of the three schools. In all three schools cross-curricular tasks appeared to have increased student awareness of different aspects of their local community through the promotion of learning relationships between students and adults other than teachers. The investigation of contemporary issues was in greater depth in Inner-city Girls than in the other two schools as teachers in the former deliberately used cross-curricular tasks as an opportunity for students to apply the skills of analysis, synthesis and generalisation that they had been teaching them. Students in Inner-city Girls also carried out self-

assessment of inquiry based tasks with much more rigour than students in the other two schools.

7.4.2. Conditions governing contribution of Cross-curricular Tasks to creating a sense of community

The conditions that contributed to cross-curricular tasks giving individual students increased feelings of security, significance and solidarity were the school ethos, the leadership of principal and course co-ordinator and the quality of student/teacher relationships. Negative attitudes of the more academic students to their less academic peers could seriously undermine the significance of some young people.. The scale of change along the continuum from an instructional to a facilitational style of teaching that teachers were prepared to make was the condition influencing the degree of autonomy that students had in relation to the management of cross-curricular tasks with its resultant feeling of increased significance. The primary condition governing the contribution of cross-curricular tasks to feelings of solidarity was the change in student/teacher relationships, where teachers increasingly saw themselves as fellow-learners with their students. A secondary condition was the extent to which teachers were prepared to collaborate with their colleagues in planning, implementing and formatively assessing cross-curricular tasks in creating a miniature learning community within the school. A further very important condition was the quality of interaction between the school and the other social systems within its ambit. There was very little interaction between schools and parents in relation to cross-curricular tasks. The conditions for interaction between schools and other social systems ranged from a multi-faceted network that had been built up and regularly renewed over a long period to a random collection

of contacts that students had to make for themselves. In two schools cross-curricular tasks appeared to have made an important contribution to Leaving Certificate Applied class groups developing as miniature communities with strong feelings of solidarity, significance and security shared by students and teachers. The increasing sense of community in turn became a powerful contextual condition influencing the outcomes of cross-curricular tasks. In the third school despite great efforts by the course co-ordinator cross-curricular tasks did not appear to have contributed to any extent to creating a sense of community.

Cross-curricular tasks contributed simultaneously to the development of community consciousness and to the development of personal effectiveness as active participation in community activities, whether inside the school or outside, required the same skills and attitudes as were required for a person to be personally effective. At another level cross-curricular tasks contributed simultaneously to young people's capacity to think critically as members of a learning community that facilitated them to develop an attitude to living with increased feelings of significance, security and solidarity, informed by a set of communal values. The depth to which students investigated contemporary issues depended on the quality of their communication skills and the extent to which they were facilitated in applying skills of analysis, synthesis and generalisation in the formulation of informed personal opinions. Self-assessment of tasks about contemporary issues also provided students with an opportunity to clarify for themselves a set of personal values on which to form judgements.

7.5. Implications of Case Study Findings

7.5.1. Three Main Areas

The three differing sets of contextual conditions portrayed in the case study indicate that it is possible to provide both the positive and negative sides of initial vocational education (see Section 1.5. above) within the same programme. In one context participants appeared to be empowered to take greater control over their own lives as increasingly positive members of society, while in the other context participants appeared to be conditioned to take directions from others with feelings of varying degrees of alienation. The case study has implications for three main areas: educational leadership; pedagogy; assessment and certification.

7.5.2. Educational Leadership

The quality of educational leadership was a decisive factor in the creation of miniature communities within the confines of the Leaving Certificate Applied class in two case study schools. The two principals had very different leadership styles reflecting their different personalities. Their personal commitment to respecting the human worth of each individual student, exemplified by their own behaviour, was a major statement of the values that informed an accepting, supportive school ethos.

Recent changes in the role of school principal are very much in line with the type of leadership that is conducive to the implementation of empowering cross-curricular tasks. There has been much discussion regarding the role of the principal in schools in Ireland during the 1990s. In the 1992 Green Paper, entitled *Education for a Changing World*, (Ireland 1992) there was a suggestion that the

principal should be a chief executive. The 1995 White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*(Ireland 1995), did not mention the term, chief executive, but quoted from the Report of the National Education Convention (Coolahan 1994).

> *Recent research has identified a strong relationship between positive school leadership and institutional effectiveness, and describes the successful principal as providing skilled instructional leadership for the staff, creating a supportive school climate, with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teaching and directed towards maximising academic learning, having clear goals and high expectations for staff and students, establishing good systems for monitoring student performance and achievement, promoting on-going staff development and inservice, and encouraging strong parental involvement and identification with, and support for the goals of the school* (Ireland 1995:42).

The Education Act (1998) specified the duties of principals under the law. The role of principal as defined in the 1998 Education Act, Ireland, appears to be in line with recent trends in USA, Australia and England and Wales from a managerial to an instructional role and from an instructional to a transformational role (Hallinger 1992), (Caldwell 1992), (Weindling 1992). While the words 'team' or 'teamwork' are not in the wording of the Education Act 1998, the linking of teachers with the principal in listing responsibilities appears to imply a movement away from hierarchical to flatter organisational structures and to put an increased emphasis on consultation and collaborative work. A unique factor in the Irish context is the rapid change over in secondary schools owned by religious orders from principals, who were members of religious orders, to lay people who have had very little experience of management roles prior to their appointment. An extra chore for the

new lay principals in secondary schools, owned by religious orders, is the development of a middle management structure in an environment where none previously existed. Traditionally posts of responsibility in those schools were filled on the basis of seniority and were generally regarded as a form of recognition of long service rather than as part of the school management structure.

The challenge for principals is the maintenance of the correct balance between the management needs and the leadership needs of the school as an institution. The management needs relate principally to the focal task of ensuring that the school survives as a social system, while the leadership needs refer primarily to the communal task of creating and maintaining a learning community..

Enacting empowering initiatives such as cross-curricular tasks involves principals in a transformational role as they have to become more proactive as curriculum leaders. It involves the formation and maintenance of teaching teams and the provision of support in the form of tangible resources and in the organisation of in-career development activities within the school as well as releasing teachers to attend courses outside school as are appropriate. Delegation of responsibilities to other staff members should not preclude the principal from showing an interest in both students and teachers who are engaged in a particular innovation. The willingness and capability of principals to provide the enacting dimension of leadership is a vital factor in a school's capacity to provide a learning environment necessary for the development and maintenance of empowering cross-curricular tasks.

Inquiry based learning and experience-based learning both demand continuous co-ordination. It is necessary that a member of teaching staff is appointed to act as co-ordinator and that the principal and the deputy principal fully

support the person concerned. The role of the co-ordinator of Leaving Certificate Applied involves the following activities: communication, planning, administration, motivation, organisation of work experience and out-of-school activities and management of the teaching team. The level of recognition given to the importance of the role of the co-ordinator and the capacity of the individual to carry out the multifarious activities involved are crucial factors in the implementation of empowering cross-curricular tasks.

The leadership of the principals and of the course co-ordinators in two of the case study schools ensured the centrality of the personal development of individual students in the Leaving Certificate Applied curriculum with a resulting growing sense of community. In one school the enlightened leadership of the co-ordinator and one of her colleagues was responsible for a significant movement towards curriculum integration where students were facilitated to learn how to learn. There was a significant difference between the Leaving Certificate Applied communities that had been created in the two schools. One was a learning community, while the other was a community that did not particularly facilitate students in coming to terms with the learning process.

The co-ordinator of what I have described as a learning community depended on the positive camaraderie that existed between staff members to maintain a level of curriculum interconnectivity. One of her colleagues was critical of the absence of regular meetings of the teaching team. She complained that they were depending on the students to motivate other teachers to be more open to greater connectivity between different disciplines. It appeared to be presumptuous to expect teachers who have been accustomed to work in a curriculum code comprised of subjects with very clear boundaries to a more integrated code in any

meaningful way unless they were facilitated in participating rationally at all stages of teambuilding discussions. It is important that teachers are facilitated in developing feelings of security, significance and solidarity as they become involved in the emerging learning community. It is a challenge to the leadership of the principal to select carefully the most appropriate people to form a team. It is then a challenge for the leadership of the co-ordinator to direct the building and maintenance of a flexible teaching team in which leadership roles are changed as cross-curricular tasks are anchored in different subject areas.

It is desirable that the group of teachers, who are facilitating cross-curricular tasks, be developed into a team capable of providing a consistent, coherent pattern of support for students. The change to integrative teaching involves a change from individual teachers working in relative isolation from their colleagues to teams of teachers working in close collaboration with each other. Bernstein (1975) said that integrated teaching required a higher level of pedagogical expertise than traditional subject-centred teaching.

> *The collection code is capable of working when staffed by mediocre teachers whereas integrated codes call for much greater powers of synthesis, analogy and for more ability to both tolerate and enjoy ambiguity at the level of knowledge and social relationships* (Bernstein 1975:108).

Traditionally teaching has been an isolated occupation in Ireland with teachers feeling totally in control within the confines of their own classrooms. Many resent any intrusion on their space. This attitude is a major obstacle to team building. It is necessary that time is made available for regular meetings so that all members of the team are kept fully informed and that they have an opportunity of working through the four stages in team-building: forming, storming, norming and

performing (Tuckman, B.W. 1965) (Moxon, P. 1993). At the forming stage people are coming together for the first time. It is a time of curiosity and maybe some suspicion as members of the group are trying to establish why they are there. At the storming stage individuals begin to assert themselves and conflicts occur between different members as teachers with different styles clash. A weakness in a team built on staff camaraderie is that the co-ordinator is inclined to avoid contentious issues. The surfacing of conflict is a necessary part of team building.

> *There is little group identity during the storming phase and sometimes the concept of the team is rejected as an ineffective way to work. ... Some members try to run away from the conflict by retreating into their own jobs, finding excuses to avoid team meetings and attempts at collaborative working* (Moxon 1993:10).

It is a major challenge not only to the leadership of the principal and the co-ordinator but also to the leadership of the other teachers in the group to get beyond the storming phase and agree on procedures for decision making that are acceptable to them as a team. The norming stage, marked by the emergence of a sense of working together, is particularly difficult for teachers of specialist subjects as they learn to be more accepting of each other's approaches to learning and to be less defensive of their own space. A greater sense of tolerance of each other's strengths and weaknesses is required if they are to become more willing to submit their teaching to the direction of the team rather than follow their own personal approach. The advance from storming to norming presents all concerned with an intensive learning opportunity as they come to terms with a shared supra-concept and become more aware of the differences in discourse associated with different subjects. Both principal and course co-ordinator are required to provide the

leadership and the mediation that will allow members to develop a sense of community within the team with feelings of security, significance and solidarity.

Team building is a slow laborious process that demands strong leadership. From my experience as joint manager of Leaving Certificate Applied team building is in its infancy in second level schools in Ireland. The scale of the problem of building an effective teaching team appears to be underestimated. The traditional rigid approach to timetabling in schools in Ireland places severe constraints on team building and as a result on cross-curricular tasks as indeed on all activities conducive to schools developing as learning communities. The school timetable derived from nineteenth century social theories (Lawton 1998) is still a dominant force in Irish second level schools at the end of the 20th century.

> *The school timetable is still largely unchallenged and not only exerts a constraining influence on the creative life of the school, but is also the official instrument used for purposes of educational accountancy. Whatever is not on the timetable does not officially exist* (Trant and O Donnabhain 1998:77).

It is hard to understand why in an age of innovation there had been so little experimentation with the format of the school day. The disruption caused to the work of schools by the release of teachers to attend planning meetings and in-career development workshops has highlighted the need for policy makers to accept that the rigid inflexible timetable is a major constraint on innovation in schools. Schools should be encouraged to experiment "with various types of learning situations other than the typical class unit – with student groups of different sizes for varying lengths of time" (Trant and O Donnabháin 1998:78).

It is difficult to see how teaching teams could ever get beyond the storming

stage unless there was time available for regular meetings of each teaching team. It is extremely difficult to schedule regular team meetings within the rigid constraints of the traditional school timetable because there are never more than three or four teachers available at any one time. In Ireland the use of the school timetable as the official instrument used for purposes of educational accountancy has forced the Department of Education and the teachers' unions into a cul-de-sac in which it is extremely difficult to negotiate the kind of working conditions conducive to a structure supportive of integrative teaching. It is difficult to see how commitments to integrated learning can be taken seriously unless all the parties involved particularly national policy makers confront the constraints imposed by a school timetable that is used also as an accountancy instrument.

Cross-curricular tasks challenge principals and co-ordinators not only to create and maintain learning communities within the school but also across other social systems outside the school. This is an additional challenge. It is a challenge to motivate teachers to build up greater connectivity with their peers in relation to work students do within the rules and regulations of the school. It is a bigger challenge to motivate teachers of specialised subjects to collaborate with people from different backgrounds with whom students work under conditions quite different from those in schools. The case study provided a revealing contrast. One school involved every member of the Leaving Certificate Applied teaching team in interacting with a variety of adults other than teachers in the locality of the school while in the other it was left to the students to interact with people outside the school themselves. The difference lay in the quality of leadership.

7.5.3. Pedagogy

The case study indicated considerable differences in pedagogical practice in the three schools. In one the norm appeared to be a concentration on a narrow range of didactic methods while in another there was an increasing emphasis on autonomous learning. In the third there were indications of slight movement away from didactic methods. The movement towards autonomous learning in Inner-city Girls indicated that cross-curricular tasks, under certain conditions, are an effective strategy to empower young people not only by giving them a greater sense of community but by enabling them to learn how to learn for themselves. Inquiry based cross-curricular tasks appeared to challenge each individual student to identify problems that were of personal concern to himself or herself that they could then attempt to solve. The co-ordinator and her colleagues displayed their pedagogical expertise in the manner in which they introduced students of all abilities to problem raising and problem solving (Bigge & Shermis 1992). Problem raising, which is the first stage of the reflective process, was approached through group brainstorming exercises. Discovering and identifying inadequacies or disharmonies in one's thinking is a great challenge for anyone, but it is particularly challenging for young people with low levels of literacy who have grown accustomed to having principles and facts handed down to them by their teachers. The young people required assistance from their teachers who appeared to have great sensitivity in encouraging individuals to start working on their own ideas no matter what level of sophistication they had reached. Initially the teachers presented students with what they considered to be real problems for society at large. The young people objected strongly that the problems raised by the teachers were boring and were quite removed from their own lives. The teachers listened to

the students and negotiated with them so as to ensure that each individual was given space to explore the disharmonies in her/his own thinking. Despite a certain amount of initial puzzlement and frustration students appeared to have become quite proficient in formulating problems in their own words. While the teachers initially had to encourage the students to the point of suggesting possible problems for investigation, by the latter part of the course students were independently stating problems clearly and outlining the way in which they proposed to address them without reference to anybody else. The approach to problem stating in Inner-city Girls was a combination of teaching by discussion in large groups, small groups and on a person to person basis in a manner that provided the student with both motivation and direction to proceed to the problem solving part of the exercise.

The Inner-city Girls experience shows that talented teachers can effectively introduce a mixed ability group of seventeen-year-old females to the different stages of problem solving. In the initial cross-curricular tasks the co-ordinator introduced students to the concept of an action plan in the following words.

> *We have our action plan - we're action people ...we're not doing anything until we have our action plan laid out - what we will do. If we can't do something it doesn't matter - at least we've thought of it!*

With that approach she directed students through the stages of problem solving: stating hypotheses, gathering relevant data to test hypotheses; interpreting and analysing all available relevant evidence; drawing conclusions consistent with the available evidence. Having taken the students through the different stages in an autocratic way initially she and her colleagues gradually allowed students to take increasing responsibility for the management of their learning relating to the cross-

curricular tasks.

Students tended to work beyond their previously indicated ability. They appeared to become more mature and more independent and to appreciate the opportunity of moving about in search of material. They particularly enjoyed opportunities of displaying and discussing their findings with their peers and with adults other than teachers. They appeared to move on to integration by adapting or discarding previously held ideas almost without realising it. This appeared to have grown out of the emphasis placed by teachers on self-assessment that encouraged and enabled the students to develop the habit of reflecting critically on their work. The consequences of inquiry based cross-curricular tasks in Inner-city Girls appeared to be consistent with the positive outcomes of a problem solving approach to learning (Bigge & Shermis 1992).

The facilitation of cross-curricular tasks presents teachers, who have become routinised in teaching a set syllabus didactically with the support of textbooks, with a major culture shock. As Ingram (1979) has said, teachers who are creative, facilitative and co-operative are best suited to deal with integrative cross-curricular tasks. They provide leadership in facilitating students to take responsibility for their own learning. They are willing to listen to students' own ideas and even to accept criticism by students of their own ideas. They have to learn how to get to know each student personally and to accept her/him as a thinking person in her/his own right. They have to learn to share information on each student with colleagues so that they are generally aware of factors influencing the psychological environment of each one. They have to be sensitive to the needs of students with a poor self-image as a result of indifferent performances in scholastic tests or as a result of a conflict with some authority figures. It is

necessary for the teachers to try to identify what are the student's real goals and the incentives and constraints that exist in his/her psychological environment so that they become partners in the learning. The most important resource a teacher has in facilitating the implementation of cross-curricular tasks is the relationship s/he establishes with individual students (Bigge & Shermis 1992).

Relationships between students are an important influence on the quality of classroom learning. Bennett and Dunne (1992) refer to the emphasis by both Vygotsky and Bruner on the importance of the social setting on learning. They referred particularly to Vygotsky's belief that a child's potential for learning is often realised in interaction with others including their peers who may be more knowledgeable than themselves. Group cross-curricular tasks give young people an opportunity to work with their peers in small groups, to participate in joint decision making and to take leadership roles when required

The relationships between teachers are also a very important factor in the implementation of cross-curricular tasks. Bernstein (1975) suggested that integrative teaching would change the centre of gravity of teacher relationships within a school. One of the possible sources of tension between teachers who are engaged in collaborative teaching is the difference in attitude to what is and is not acceptable behaviour by students. Willis (1977:63) claimed that there was a basic teacher paradigm dominant in schools "that teaching is essentially a relationship between potential contenders for supremacy". The degree of control that integrative teaching, with its weak framing, concedes to students is a cause of greater unease to some teachers than to others and needs to be addressed openly and frankly if an effective inter-teacher collaborative relationship is to flourish.

While the Inner-city Girls approach to inquiry based cross-curricular tasks

provided an excellent exemplar of teaching for exploratory understanding the approach to work experience based tasks was much less satisfactory. The correct procedures for organising work experience placements were followed meticulously, but it did not seem to have been perceived by the teachers as part of the curriculum. They appeared to have shared the common dilemma of teachers who regard work experience as "a thing apart" (Young 1998:58). They did not appear to perceive the need for a conscious engagement with the experience through reflection for learning to occur. The preliminary work preceding placements appeared to have been dominated by organisational matters with insufficient emphasis on problem raising. While there had been contacts with employers students did not appear to have had sufficient support in considering the changing nature of the current economic environment so as to focus on a particular disharmony in their own thinking while on placement. A work experience logbook enabled students to keep records of their observations, but there did not appear to have been enough emphasis on analysing and synthesising in the light of reflection on personal observations and emotions. The case study indicated that there is an urgent need in Ireland for teacher educators at both initial and in-career levels to address both the theoretical and practical dimensions of experiential learning.

7.5.4. Assessment and Certification

A clear indicator of the difference in the quality of pedagogy between Inner-city Girls and the other two schools was the attitude to student self-assessment. Both students and teachers in Inner-city Girls regarded formative assessment leading on to student self-assessment as an essential element of inquiry based cross-curricular tasks. In Market Town Coed the teachers were diffident about their own

capabilities of facilitating students in self-assessment procedures. In Rural Co-ed the co-ordinator was opposed to student self-assessment, as he felt it was unfair to ask weak students to criticise their own work. He appeared to view assessment as a totally negative fault-finding exercise. While formative assessment was an integral element of the learning process in Inner-city Girls, any teacher based assessment that occurred in the other two schools appeared to be in the form of preparing for the summative assessment by external assessors. Their approach was consistent with the overemphasis on summative assessment procedures that has been a feature of second level schooling in Ireland for many years.

In 1991 the OECD examiners had reported that it was widely agreed in Ireland that a major review of assessment, examining and credentialing was "long overdue" (OECD 1991:72). Callan (1995) referred to the dominance of written examinations and the transmission model of teaching. He claimed that schools were organised specifically for the transmission of information via textbooks. All organisational arrangements were based on schools as transmitters of knowledge and on the procedures used to assess the acquisition of that knowledge.

Leaving Certificate Applied was originally designed on the understanding that the teachers who taught the course would undertake the summative assessment of their own students' cross-curricular tasks (See Chapter 1.). However, the two teacher unions that were involved refused to allow their members to participate. One objected on the grounds that teachers should be paid for the extra work involved. The other objected on the grounds that it would undermine the working relationship between teachers and students. This latter point was the subject of a protracted debate in the Leaving Certificate Applied steering committee (Transcript of interview with Jim Gleeson July 1999). It was never resolved and the

Department of Education and Science eventually established a system of external summative assessment whereby external examiners, the majority of whom were teaching Leaving Certificate Applied classes, examined written reports and interviewed students individually for approximately fifteen minutes. Morgan & Kelleghan (1998) argued strongly in favour of teachers being involved in summative assessment. They claimed that there are several advantages in using teachers' knowledge of their students for assessment purposes. Teachers are in a position to make judgements on the basis of information accumulated over a period of time in different situations. Teachers acquire knowledge of different student achievements that cannot be tested by written examinations. They also referred to the fact that examinations tended to be artificial and to generate fear. McCormack & Archer (1998:33) claimed that there is not any evidence that the traditional role of the teacher would be undermined by teachers being involved in assessing their own students.

It is debatable whether teachers can maintain a proper balance between the summative assessment and the formative assessment of their own students. The level of commitment to formative assessment together with the capability to provide articulate feedback in a language the individual student understands is central to the teaching / learning process. Assessment has the capacity to have a very positive impact on the quality of learning if it is carried out efficiently.

> *It can have powerful and transforming effects on learners' ability to diagnose their own strengths and weaknesses and to assess their own progress and independence in learning* (Ecclestone 1996:161).

Alternatively assessment can be a very destructive force.

> *At its most negative, though, assessment can undermine motivation for*

learning or lead to failure or dropout (ibid.)

Ecclestone (1996) identified two different learning theories that influence the ways in which assessments are carried out. One approach based on the positivist tradition, holds that learning specified outcomes can be measured objectively in a rational, logical manner. The other approach, based on the constructivist tradition, holds that since the learner constructs her/his own knowledge it cannot be measured accurately without allowing for the psychological environment with which the learner is interacting. Assessments based on the positivist tradition purport to be an exact science, providing neutral impartial information whereas constructivist assessments have to be considered in relation to the factors that comprise the learner's psychological environment.

As cross-curricular tasks are more conducive to an exploratory-understanding mode of learning based on a cognitive interactionist psychology, a constructivist approach to assessment appears to be the more appropriate. Ecclestone (1996) explained that the constructivist approach involved a process of constructing and reconstructing ideas about the knowledge and skills being assessed.

> *In turn, assessment designers have their own constructions about assessment which are embodied in the specifications. Teachers and learners therefore have to engage in dialogue and collaboration to make sense of the 'constructions' embodied in the specifications so that they arrive at their own understanding of what is required. This is necessary if the assessment is going to have a positive effect on learning* (Ecclestone 1996:163).

Many commentators have commented on the diversity of uses to which assessment

is put (Jamieson (1991); Ecclestone (1996); Morgan & Kelleghan (1998). These can be reduced to two main categories i.e. formative assessments that are basically intended to help the learner in improving the quality of the learning and summative assessments that are intended to provide evidence for a general audience, including the learner, of what has been learnt and are usually the basis for some form of credential.

Formative assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching. It can relate to the ongoing learning process and to the products of learning. The essential element of formative evaluation is the regular provision of understandable feedback by teachers to learners. Formative assessments, which can be either formal or informal, are basically diagnostic in that they assist the learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Because most formal diagnostic testing has been done in relation to the initial stage of courses particularly in the case of people with specific learning problems, there appears to be a tendency to neglect diagnostic assessment in the mainstream of teachers' work.

> *However, diagnostic assessment is not only about the types of initial assessment described above. It is also a central – and often overlooked – aspect of formal assessment, and it plays a crucial role in raising learners' achievements and motivating them to be effective in how they learn, as well as in what they learn. Diagnostic assessment, when used well, enables people to learn about learning* (Ecclestone 1996:72).

Of course, that is not to underestimate the importance of diagnostic testing at the beginning of courses. It is particularly important in the case of prevocational courses where there appears to be a great spread of ability among participants and some appear to have particular difficulties relating to literacy and numeracy. Initial

diagnostic assessments enable teachers to get to know individuals' needs and aspirations together with whatever negative attitudes they are bringing from their previous school experiences. They may also help teachers to communicate the strengths that individuals are bringing to the programme and on which they can build in the future. The impact of initial diagnostic testing can be motivational if handled effectively and help both teachers and students to form a positive working relationship.

Cross-curricular tasks are particularly suited to ipsative assessment, where learners are encouraged to specify personal criteria to which they may aspire in the short term. Ipsative assessment is a very effective way of establishing an ongoing dialogue between individual learners and teachers and between learners and their peers. It is also an effective way of introducing learners to self-assessment and to taking personal responsibility for their own learning.

Formative assessment, including both diagnostic and ipsative forms, presents teachers with a great challenge to their professionalism as its effectiveness depends very much on the quality of the feedback provided to the learner. Indications are that many teachers are not particularly skilful in providing feedback in an understandable positive manner. Ecclestone (1996) referred to the work of Winter (1994) and Gipps (1995) in stating that research showed that teachers had difficulty in articulating their notions about standards of work required. Does this suggest that teachers allow the summative purpose of assessment overshadow the formative to the detriment of the quality of student learning?

There is much confusion about formative and summative assessments. They are not differentiated on the basis of the techniques used or the timescale but on the purpose for which they are used. It is possible for the same assessment to be

used simultaneously for the two different purposes and this is where problems arise.

> *All assessments have the potential to fulfil a summative function, whereas assessment is only formative if the feedback which learners get from it enables them to improve and change their performance* (Ecclestone 1996:15).

Any assessment can fulfil its summative purpose, but the question of reliability demands that the level of interaction between individual assessors and learners is reduced to a minimum. On the other hand, the extent to which an assessment fulfills its formative purpose depends on the maximum interaction between the assessor and the learners. It is a major difficulty to maintain an acceptable balance between the two functions. Referring to the GNVQ experience in UK Ecclestone (1996:15) warned that "assessment can drift away from a careful and conscientious attempt by many teachers to diagnose learning needs, towards a fragmented and mechanistic process of compiling evidence towards what is needed for summative assessment".

Assessment is a very complex issue that needs to be addressed with an open mind and without hidden agendas. Two major difficulties need to be addressed. How to reconcile the demands of reliability and validity? Increased reliability tends to narrow the range of assessment to the least important parts of the learning, while validity broadens the range with the result that assessment becomes excessively cumbersome. And how to ensure that teachers have the capacity to give students the benefits of efficient formative assessment? Whatever the arrangements are for summative assessment and certification, effective formative assessment is essential to empower people to take an increasing responsibility for

their own future learning. Unfortunately, there always seems to be a tendency to allow the requirements of what appears to be a reliable summative system take precedence over all other considerations.

> *If political and funding requirements are emphasised at the expense of broader, more educational aims for assessment, summative, external purposes of assessment will dominate whatever the rhetoric says otherwise* (Ecclestone 1996:161).

Stenhouse (1975) argued that there was "a conflict of demand between appraisal as teaching and appraisal as grading". He said that in appraisal as teaching the differing abilities of teachers were acceptable but in appraisal as grading care had to taken to ensure that students were not penalised because of the shortcomings of their teachers.

> *The more objective an examination, the more it fails to reveal the quality of good teaching and good learning* (Stenhouse 1975:95).

From the evidence of the case study it appears that the teachers in two case study schools needed to become much more proficient in the formative assessment of their own students before they would be capable of taking responsibility in a balanced manner for the summative assessment of the same students.

The form of certification of Leaving Certificate Applied differed fundamentally from that of the other Leaving Certificate programmes. Leaving Certificate Applied was a single award (Distinction 85 –100 credits; Merit 70-84 credits; Pass 60-69 credits) based on the accumulation of credits, while the certification of Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes was in the form of grades for six or seven individual subjects. Teachers expressed great anger at the way the self-confidence of Leaving Certificate Applied

participants was being undermined by being asked by potential employers questions such as how many C1 grades they had attained. Teachers in Inner-city Girls claimed that the Department of Education and Science campaign to make employers aware of Leaving Certificate Applied had been inadequate. In fact it was inevitable that any new form of certification would have a poorer currency value in the labour market unless it could be translated easily by human resource personnel to equivalence with the recognised standards. In Ireland grades in individual Leaving Certificate subjects are the standards that are used for entry to third level and for selection purposes by employers. The adequacy of the single Leaving Certificate Applied award as a passport to the labour market and to third level needs to be reviewed urgently. The single grade was inherited from the Senior Certificate, but it should not be forgotten that the Senior Certificate participant also received an official Record of Personal Experience and Achievement verified by the school principal. Much more work is required to provide structured routes for participants in Leaving Certificate Applied to further education and training and to the labour force as recommended by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC 1993).

The limited currency of Leaving Certificate Applied in the labour market and as an entry qualification to third level courses was a major disadvantage of the policy decision to 'ringfence' Leaving Certificate Applied. The designer of Leaving Certificate Applied said that it had been envisaged that 'ringfencing' would create the freedom to explore a wide range of innovative assessment procedures compatible with the type of learning required by young people in transition from school to work (Appendix 4). The failure of the negotiations between the Department of Education and Science and the teacher unions inhibited

the range of innovative assessment procedures. 'Ringfencing' did create the freedom that allowed schools, if they wished, to move significantly along the continuum from what Bernstein (1975) described as a curriculum collection code to a more integrated code. The breakdown in negotiations between the Department of Education and the teacher unions should not be an alibi for not exploring the possibilities of using assessments in the constructivist tradition for summative as well as formative assessment. The evidence of the case study suggests that it is not only an industrial relations problem. It poses a major challenge for school principals, practising teachers and teacher educators that will demand a marriage of learning theories with examples of the best practice in our schools (Young 1998).

7.6. Summary

The impact of cross-curricular tasks on empowerment of students with reference to their personal effectiveness, their capacity to think for themselves and their sense of community depended particularly on contextual conditions. The quality of school ethos, leadership of principals and co-ordinators, student/teacher relationships, attitudes to assessment and links with other social systems appeared to be the main conditions that influenced the self-esteem of students and their sense of community. The expertise of teachers was the principal factor influencing the impact of cross-curricular tasks on students' capability to think more critically for themselves and in increasing their employability.

The main implications of the findings are in relation to educational leadership, pedagogy and assessment and certification procedures. The empowerment of students is enhanced by educational leadership informed by a value system based on an appreciation of the human worth of individuals and the

importance of a sense of community. Proactive leadership by the principal in relation to curriculum issues is essential for the creation of a learning community in which both students and teachers have increased feelings of security, significance and solidarity as they develop learning relationships with people both inside and outside the school. The case study provided evidence to show that talented teachers are capable of successfully introducing a mixed ability group of seventeen-year-old females to problem-based learning. The case study also showed that there is an urgent need for teacher educators in Ireland to address specific pedagogical deficits. While there was evidence of some gifted facilitators of inquiry based learning there were others who were particularly diffident about their own personal capacity to do so. There appeared to be a particular need to address the theory of experiential learning at both initial and in-career levels and in particular in courses relating to educational management and leadership. There were indications that many teachers did not appreciate the importance of formative assessment in student learning particularly in the constructivist tradition. There appeared to be a need for an intensive education programme in assessment procedures consistent with the constructivist tradition before many teachers in the case study schools would be capable of carrying out with validity the summative assessment of their own students' cross-curricular tasks.

The majority of the young people who participated in the case study considered Leaving Certificate Applied to have been worthwhile. The indicators of their empowerment have to be considered in the full realisation of the constraints facing people who have become marginalised from the formal education system. A salutary reminder of the constraints was the high percentage of Leaving Certificate Applied participants from what appeared to be the most empowering of the three

schools who had dropped out of further education courses within nine months of completing Leaving Certificate Applied with distinction.

Barriers of structure confine them to a limited range of courses despite how well they might have performed in Leaving Certificate Applied. They have to cope with barriers of prejudice arising from the lower status that is given to prevocational courses within the formal school system. They also have to be prepared to revert from an inquiry-based approach to learning and teaching to a more didactic approach. On the other hand they face barriers when they go directly on to the labour market, as their Leaving Certificate Applied has not the same currency as the traditional Leaving Certificate. They face serious obstacles whichever way they turn. There is a need for structured routes for people who have become marginalised from the mainstream of formal education to be guided and supported in getting back into the system. If they decide to go to work their chances of getting into Third Level subsequently as mature students will be less than other mature students with a Leaving Certificate (Lynch 2000).

The manner in which they cope with the obstacles they encounter will be influenced by the extent they have been empowered or disempowered by their families and their schools to continue learning how to learn. The nature of their empowerment will only be reflected in the contribution life-long learning will make to their quality of life as they strive to cope with the disadvantages of their ring-fenced starting position. While there is a beginning and an end to formal schooling education is an integral part of living. Education is much more than the accumulation of credentials and honours leading to upward social mobility. It is really about improving the quality of one's own life and the quality of one's contribution to the welfare of others.

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APPENDICES

1. Parent's Form of Consent
2. Schedule of Interviews with Students in Case Study Schools.
3. Schedule of Interviews with Teachers in Case Study Schools.
4. Interview Schedule: Jim Gleeson.
5. Interview Schedule: Sheila O Driscoll.
6. An Example of Open Coding.
7. An Example of Axial Coding.
8. Selective Coding: Logic Diagram (incorporating all data relevant to research).
9. Photocopy of Department of Education Circular Letter 73/95.

APPENDIX 1

Parent's Form of Consent

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I wish to consent to my son/daughter _____ participating in a research project related to the Leaving Certificate Applied. I understand that he/she will not be named in any reports that are written about the research.

Signed _____ *Date* _____

APPENDIX 2

Schedule of Interviews with Students in Case Study Schools

Students were interviewed three times between November 1996 and May 1997. At the first interview I confirmed that I had received the form of consent signed by one of the parents of each student before I began. I explained to each student that I was not in any way examining her/him, but that I wanted to know what s/he really thought about Leaving Certificate Applied in general and the Student Tasks in particular. I asked for the permission of each individual to record further interviews on audiotape. I invited them to bring a copy of a particular task to the second interview if they wished.

I focused the second interview on a particular task(s) that they were willing to discuss. In discussing a particular task I attempted to address the following:

- Choosing a topic;
- Planning a task;
- Gathering information;
- Relationship between modules and cross-curricular tasks;
- Favourite tasks;
- Time – deadlines;
- Relationships with teachers and other Senior Cycle students;
- Information Communications Technology;
- Tasks related to work experience placements / mini-enterprises;
- Assessment Procedures.

I based the third interview on the following questions, but I allowed the interviewee to steer the conversation in a particular direction if s/he appeared to be anxious to speak about a particular thing.

Which was your favourite task?

Why did you pick that particular task?

What was your aim for that task?

Were you on your own or were other people involved?

If a group was involved how did you divide the work between you?

What sort of plan did you have when you started it?

Why were you happy that you picked that particular one?

How did you get information?

Did you go to the library?

Did you write many letters?

Did you make many phone calls?

How many people did you interview?

Did you make appointments yourself?

Did you look forward to doing the first interview?

How did you prepare for it?

Who else did you interview?

Did you prepare a questionnaire?

How much time did you spend on the task compared to others?

How long was your report compared to other tasks?

Did you use what you were learning in the modules in the Student Tasks?

Which do you prefer working on key assignments in modules or in Student Tasks?

Are you getting on better with teachers now than when you did your Junior Cert?

Have you noticed any change in your teachers?

Is there any difference in the way teachers relate to you when you are doing Student Tasks?

Do the other students who are doing the Leaving Certificate ever talk to you about Leaving certificate Applied? What do they say?

Would you say that they are working harder than you?

Where have you been on work experience?

Have you enjoyed being on work experience?

Could you list for me the things you have learned from work experience/?

What did you learn about yourself?

What is the difference between when you are working in a part-time job and on work experience?

How did you find the assessment interviews?

What did you like about it? What did you dislike?

Were you pleased with the number of credits you got?

What would you say you learned from Student Tasks?

Five years from now, if you were to look back, what do you think you might say that you had learned from Student Tasks?

OR

What do you think you have learned out of those tasks that will be of use to you when you are twenty two?

What do your parents think of the Leaving Certificate Applied?

Do you ever discuss the Student Tasks with them?

APPENDIX 3

Schedule of Interviews with Teachers in Case Study schools

The interviews were based on the three issues that I had identified at the beginning of the case study (see Section 2.7.).

Issue A: The student task is a functional type of curriculum integration based on the needs and interests of the participants that provides an effective introduction to lifelong learning.

A.1. Needs and Interests of Participants

A.1.1. To what extent do Student Tasks relate to the needs and interests of the students themselves?

A.1.2. How much choice do you give students in deciding on a topic?

A.1.3. With what degree of choice do you think a student can cope?

A.1.4. How do you facilitate them in choosing a topic?

A.1.5. To what extent do students focus on intimate details of their family lives? Are they encouraged or discouraged to do this by you?

A.2. Collaborative Learning

A.2.1. To what extent do you encourage students to collaborate with one another in Student Tasks?

A.2.2. What are the difficulties that you have experienced in facilitating group tasks?

A.2.3. How do you deal with those difficulties?

A.3. Learning through Enquiry

A.3.1. What are the main difficulties you see in learning through enquiry?

A.3.2. What are the principal sources of information that your students use?

A.3.3. What are the greatest difficulties that your students experience in learning through enquiry?

A.3.4. How do you help students to cope with those difficulties?

A.4. Life after School

A.4.1. To what extent do students relate Student Tasks to life after school as they envisage it?

A.5. Linkages with Modules

A.5.1. To what extent do students apply what they learn in the modules to Student Tasks?

A.5.2. How do the different team members agree on Student Tasks?

A.5.3. Is there a team approach to Student Tasks?

A.5.4. How do you encourage students to make linkages between different modules in the Student Task?

Issue B: The Student Task facilitates students to gain access to a broad range of knowledge and to develop their abilities for employment and economic life.

B.1 Access to a broad base of Knowledge.

B.1.1. What library facilities are used by students?

B.1.2. Tell me about students' visits to public library? Once off? Fairly regularly?

B.1.3. Do they have access to source materials here in school?

Reference books? CDRoms? Internet?

B.1.4. What are their principal ways of accessing information?

Letters? Phone-calls? Visits? Surveys?

B.1.5. How do you prepare students to carry out surveys? Design questionnaires?

Interpret responses?

B.2. Abilities for Employment

B.2.1. To what extent do Student Tasks enable students to practise basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic?

B.2.2. To what extent does the Student Task increase an awareness of languages other than English?

B.2.3. To what extent does the Student Task promote oral skills, listening skills?

B.2.4. To what extent does the Student Task promote basic skills in Information Communications Technology?

B.2.5. Do Student Tasks promote the ability to co-operate? to work as part of a team?

B.2.6. Do Student Tasks promote creativity? The quest for quality?

B.2.7. How many Student Tasks do you base on work experience placements? In what way do the placements relate to the students' future employability?

B.3. Career Development

B.3.1. How do Student Tasks contribute to students' career planning?

B.3.2. Do you encourage students to carry out a skills audit as part of a Student Task? Is it effective?

B.4. Enterprise Development

B.4.1. What enterprising characteristics/traits do students develop with the assistance of Student Tasks?

B.4.2. Could you suggest the type of Student Tasks that would be likely to promote the development of enterprising characteristics?

B.4.3. Have any of your students done Student Tasks based on a mini-enterprise? In what way did the mini-enterprise experience relate to their future employability?

Issue C: The Student Task based on experiential learning leads to a learning environment that is fundamentally different from that usually existing in second level schools in Ireland.

C.1. Transactions between learner and her/his environment

C.1.1. Is there a difference between your relationship with students when working on Student Tasks and when working on modules?

C.1.2. How do you Leaving Certificate Applied students relate to teachers who are not currently teaching them?

C.1.3. How do Leaving Certificate Applied students relate to other Senior Cycle students?

C.1.4. Have Leaving Certificate Applied students the same status in the school as other Senior Cycle students?

C.1.5. Are there many disciplinary problems with Leaving Certificate Applied students compared to other Senior Cycle students? Source of problems?

C.1.6. What is the reaction / level of involvement of parents in Student Tasks?

C.1.7. What other out-of-school agencies have been involved in Student Tasks?

C.1.8. To what extent do tasks disrupt the normal running of the school?

C.2. Adaptation to the World

C.2.1. How has the Student Task affected the self-confidence of the students?

C.2.2. In what way do Student Tasks prepare students for adult life?

C.2.3. Do Student Tasks help students to learn how to learn?

C.2.4. To what extent do Student Tasks influence students' attitudes?

C.2.5. Do Student Tasks contribute to character development? To the personal integrity of the students?

C.3. Quality of Learning

C.3.1. Do students usually have a sense of achievement in relation to Student Tasks?

C.3.2. What opportunities have students to display Student Tasks publicly? Do they enjoy that?

C.3.3. What do they actually learn from Student Tasks? How do you know?

C.3.4. Is there a routine for students to follow as they are working on Student Tasks?

C.3.5. Do students use Action Planning in working on Student Tasks? Please describe.

C.3.6. Is there a danger of students developing an uncritical stereotyped approach to Student Tasks?

C.3.7. Do students keep a record of their experiences in relation to Student Tasks?

C.3.8. How do you evaluate the quality of learning in Student Tasks? What criteria do you use?

C.3.9. How do you encourage students to carry out self-evaluation of their own learning? Is it possible for students to carry out self-evaluation of Student Tasks?

C.4. Impact of Assessment Procedures

C.4.1. Were you happy with the way the external assessors assessed Student Tasks?

C.4.2. Were any of your students assessed on her/his contribution to a group task?

C.4.3. Do the external assessment procedures encourage students to collaborate with one another?

C.4.4. Are you satisfied with the way results of Student Task assessments are communicated to students?

C.4.5. Did you feel the results were reasonably consistent with the quality of students' work?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Schedule: Jim Gleeson

29 July 1999

1. Cross-curricular Tasks

- Why were cross-curricular tasks introduced to Leaving Certificate Applied?
- At what stage of the design of Leaving Certificate Applied were tasks introduced as an integral part of the curriculum?
- Which are more important individual tasks or group tasks?
- What type of curriculum frame did you envisage for planning tasks? Did you think of students working on different aspects of a particular Theme or Topic OR did you feel that students should be given freedom to choose whatever was of particular interest to themselves?
- At the design stage how did you think that schools could provide adequate resources for students who would be engaged in tasks?
- What consideration was given to the position of students who had serious literacy deficits undertaking cross-curricular tasks?
- How important is it for students to display the outcomes of their tasks to the local community?
- What form did you envisage the teacher-based assessment of cross-curricular tasks taking?

2. Model of curriculum

- Is Leaving Certificate Applied an amalgam of two models of curriculum? In Stenhouse terms are the modules an example of an objectives model, while the tasks are an example of a process model?

3. Integration

The original published guidelines on the Student Task state that the task has a key role to play in providing a vehicle for curricular integration in the context of a modular curriculum.

- How would you define 'integration'?
- Was there much discussion about the meaning of the word 'integration' at the design stage of the development of the curriculum?

The guidelines refer to the context of a modular curriculum.

- Do you believe that there is a difference in curricular integration in the context of a modular curriculum from the context of a subject-based curriculum?
- In your opinion what are the main pedagogical skills required of a teacher to facilitate integration effectively?

APPENDIX 5

Interview Schedule: Sheila O'Driscoll

18 August 1999

- What are teachers' greatest strengths and weaknesses in context of LCA?
- What are students' greatest strengths and weaknesses in context of LCA?
- What are principals' greatest strengths and weaknesses in context of LCA?
- Is LCA too demanding of teachers? Of students?
- What does the word integration mean to teachers who are teaching LCA classes?
- What difficulties have you experienced in dealing with the concept of integration at inservice?
- Why is LCA concentrating on integration when there are no integrated courses at PLC level?
- To what extent is the sourcing of tasks in modules happening? Strengths? Weaknesses?
- Critics of LCA say that concentration on knowledge and skills related to everyday life deprives young people of the valued knowledge of the dominant groups in society?
- What are the main factors that determine the success of a work experience placement?
- In what ways are the present assessment procedures impacting on the manner in which Leaving Certificate Applied is being implemented?

APPENDIX 6

An Example of Open Coding

The following is an illustration of the manner in which I carried out open coding (see p.32). The data used in the illustration consists of short excerpts from transcripts of interviews relating to the assessment of group tasks together with a brief quotation from the published reports of the Leaving Certificate Applied Chief Examiner (1996 and 1997). The excerpts are from interviews with two students, the principal of the students' school, the teacher who acted as coordinator of Leaving Certificate Applied programme in the school, another teacher from the school who was teaching Leaving Certificate Applied students and a teacher from another school who had acted as external assessor of cross-curricular tasks on two occasions. The teacher, who had acted as external assessor, never had contact with the school in question and to my knowledge did not know any of the people involved. She did not know what the other people had said.

I have placed a summary of open coding immediately following the excerpt to which it refers. I should stress that the open coding based on each excerpt was changed a number of times as an axial coding paradigm (see p.34) was developed. The version of open coding recorded in the summaries is that reached at the conclusion of the development of the first draft of that particular axial coding paradigm.

Excerpt from interview with Angela (student)

O Donnabáin: *You were assessed yesterday on your task on Amnesty? You told me about the task before. How did it finish up?*

Angela: *It finished all right, but we were called in two or three times because we had separate reports and she had to do different things...*

Ó Donnabháin: *She must have been very interested when she called you back a couple of times.*

Angela: *Yes, she wanted to know what we did ourselves and who did the different parts of it ... that was what she wanted to know... It was about 56 pages in the end. We took pictures of each other looking at the CD-ROM and we took pictures of the library where we stood and got our information.*

Ó Donnabháin: *What did the woman, who was doing the assessment, say about it?*

Angela: *She said it was good... we did a raffle here and we sent money to Amnesty International.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Which tasks did you enjoy most?*

Angela: *I liked doing a personal profile... work experience on horses and all that ... and the hotel and catering ones this year and last year.*

The summary of the open coding is in the form of a table showing the category of concepts with its properties and their dimensions.

Open Coding based on excerpt from interview with Angela (a student).

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessing Group Tasks	Assessor	External; Conscientious
	Teachers	Not involved in assessment procedures
	Group	2 persons, one female, one male
	Contributions of group members	Difficult to identify
	Form of assessment	Looking at report ... Interviewing individual students
	Interviews	2 or 3 re one task
	Rigour of assessment	Searching ... thorough
	Sensitivity of assessor	Reasonably affirming
	Type of Task	Inquiry-based
	Report	In form of one document... 56 pages
	Resources	Books from library; CD ROM from NGO
	Reaction of student	Bemused but affirmed to a certain extent re assessment
		Sense of achievement re task

Excerpt from interview with Peter (a student who worked with Angela on task)

Peter: *I was brought into the room three times. She asked me about the last thing we were doing together ... and she called us back in ...because we were supposed to put down 'I did that' but the two of us whenever we went downtown to the library it was together ... but we had to write down 'I did this'. It was terrible. I went in the last class on Monday evening ... then she called me first thing on Tuesday morning and then after that as well ... Angela was called in twice.*

Ó Donnabháin: *It was a great project anyhow. Did you go on and have the raffle?*

Peter: *We did we made £46.60. The tickets that we sold ourselves were 20p each and we made £46.60 and we posted it on to Amnesty International.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Did they give you a receipt?*

Peter: *No, that did not come back yet ... nothing so far.*

Ó Donnabháin: *You did all that you set out to do.*

Peter: *We did but the assessment was disappointing ... she called me back in three times ... and there was no reason for it. For what we did for this raffle the two of us went to the shops ... the two of us went to the library... the two of us went up to the computer room to do the CD-ROM... the two of us were leaving class together ... everything was together....but she made us put down 'I...I did this and I did that' rather than 'we'...I can't wait to see what grade I will get.*

Ó Donnabháin: *You got a great kick out of it anyhow.*

Peter: *It was a great task. It was the best task I did ever ... I thought it was the best task I ever did in my life. During the years here in the school I had to do projects ... Amnesty was the best task I ever did.*

Ó Donnabháin: *What would you say you learned from it ?*

Peter: *I learned an awful lot from it. I learned that so many people are being held in prison for no reason ... They are being held in prison for their colour or their sex or their religion ... I learned that an awful lot more people can help them. Well they can ... there is this thing that... I can't think of the name of it ... We can join Amnesty International and we can go to these places. We can see the people...and talk to them about how they're being treated.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Do you think that you will continue to be a member of Amnesty?*

Peter: *I think so.*

Ó Donnabháin: *You get on great with all the teachers?*

Peter: *Yes, they are all great especially Mrs XXXXX and Fr XXXXX... it was mad here the week of the raffle ... we were getting the hall organised and sorting out the raffle and the tickets and the prizes. The prizes were a box of biscuits, a box of Taytos, tee shirts, scarves, gloves, two vouchers...*

Ó Donnabháin: *Did you have to go shopping to buy those?*

Peter: *No, we went to the local shops and we asked them to donate the prizes. We were amazed at the response that we got. They asked us what was it about*

Open Coding based on excerpt from interview with Peter (a student).

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessing group tasks	Assessor	External; Conscientious
	Group	2 persons, one female, one male
	Teachers	Not involved in assessment
	Individual contributions	Very difficult to identify
	Form	Read report; Examine exhibit if any; Interview individual students
	Interviews	3 re Amnesty task
	Rigour of assessment	Searching, thorough
	Sensitivity of assessor	Very low - 'It was terrible'
	Joint report on Task	Changes required: 'we did' to 'I did'
	Type of Task	Inquiry-based
	Sources	CD ROM, books
	Teachers' Role	Supportive, facilitative, non-directive
	Community	Supportive; provision of prizes; asking about human rights
	Reaction of student	Diminished by behaviour of assessor
		Great difficulty understanding reason for identifying individual contributions to joint task.
		Great sense of achievement re task
		Increased sense of community both locally and globally.

Excerpt from interview with principal of Angela's and Peter's School

Principal: ... *With 95% of the assessment that was done I would be quite happy with it. The examiners have been extremely approachable, very encouraging to the pupils. There were one or two exceptions where people tended to be dictatorial and not encouraging, not mol an óige* (praise the youth).

Ó Donnabháin: *You had difficulty in relation to collaboration between students, did you not?*

Principal: *Maybe part of that is our preparation of the students for the Task. If students get together to ...*

Ó Donnabháin: *Is not that one of the most important things they want to get people to do, to work as part of a team?*

Principal: *If you get people to collaborate it is very difficult to come back to them and say 'now you must write down what you did and you must write down what you did. It's a bit like when you get two heads going together and then the examiner says 'I want it presented that this is your work and this is your work'. You can write down I went to the library and the other person saying 'I went to the library' but you can't break the singer and the song.*

Open Coding based on excerpt from interview with principal.

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessment of Group Task	External Assessors	95% satisfactory
	Sensitivity of Assessors	Encouraging ... dictatorial
	Problems re Individualised assessment of group tasks	Due to preparation of students partly.
		Moving to and fro from collaboration to individualisation

Excerpt from interview with Leaving Certificate Applied Co-ordinator

Co-ordinator: ... *A small number of students had formed groups. Two particular students who would have poor enough literacy levels had done Trojan work on Amnesty International. They had written a lot of letters. They had run a raffle to make money for Amnesty International. There was certainly a lot more work than 20 hours in it. Now they presented the very same task. They had the same content. They had two copies of the same content. There was easily enough work for two if not more in it. It was a very, very good task. Now they got a lot of aggravation from the examiner as the examiner wanted to know what each did and would not accept that they did this together. They had gone to twenty-six shops in the town to collect spot prizes for the raffle. Now they had gone together. They had organised the raffle together. They sold tickets together. They had used the CDROM together. They had gone to the library together. They had done the work together. One of those students, the boy in that pairing, had never worked successfully with another student before. He probably would not have worked successfully with anyone else. She was able to drag him along and put manners on him.*

They got a lot of hardship about it. They were very upset that their task was questioned because they were very confident about their task. They had done the same task but each of them had done plenty of work in it. They had put a lot of hours into it.....

Ó Donnabháin: *That is a problem all right when there is a group task.*

Co-ordinator: *The task promotes the student's ability to act as part of a team but when it comes to the assessment you are on your own!*

Ó Donnabháin: Were there any other problems with the assessment?

Co-ordinator: *We did have a girl going in spinning a whole tale to the examiner and the examiner swallowing it and another girl going in and the examiner asking did you take part in a particular activity and the girl saying 'no, that never happened'.*

Open Coding based on excerpt from interview with Leaving Certificate Applied Co-ordinator

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessing Group Tasks	Group	2 persons, one male, one female; female leader; male difficult but collaborative
	Report	One document, 56pp
	Individual Contributions	Not identified
	Quality of task	Very, very good
	Rigour of assessment	Searching ... 3 interviews/one task
	Sensitivity of Assessor	Cause of aggravation
	Impact on Co-ordinator	Confused re assessment procedures
	Credibility of Students	Questionable
	Co-ordination of Tasks	Low level of awareness of Guidelines re external assessment procedures
	Emphasis on Process	Little
	Emphasis on Report	Over-emphasis
	Volume of Students' Work	Very high
	Quality of Students' Work	Greatly improved
	Reaction of Students	Self-confidence increased by task but decreased by assessment
		Considerable aggravation

Excerpt from interview with one of Angela's and Peter's teachers

Teacher: *We had two students in whom I could see such development because I had both those students over the years. They presented a Task on Amnesty. They did an amount of work. They did Trojan work. They even organised a raffle and went around and asked for sponsorship in the shops and then they came and presented the Task. Now, each of them is quite competent on the computer and on the word processor and both were very proud of what they had done. They had worked together each doing some of the research. For instance they would take a particular theme and one worked on one area and the other worked on some other area. Then they had to present the whole thing as one project but they wanted to have their own copy. They were very particular about that – they did it together but they each wanted a copy of this final Task. The examiner questioned them and brought one student in three times. She questioned him. She asked why did he do this, why was the same Task done by two students. That was explained to her. Yet he was asked in again. 'How did you do that ? Why did you do this?' The boy has a stutter. I felt he has come on in leaps and bounds in the two years since he started Leaving Certificate Applied. His self-confidence, I felt, was undermined totally if it was not for the fact that we reassured him. We reassured the girl, who has blossomed from a girl who was almost ineducible, I felt at the beginning of First Year, to a student who is very competent now and is thinking of something in Third Level in the Hotel and Catering area. And we saw these people who were undermined from this Gestapo type approach to assessment. I felt very annoyed about it.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Did the examiner consult with you at all?*

Teacher: *Not with me, perhaps with my colleague but not with me.*

They felt diminished, absolutely, absolutely and I was very angry. You do so much for students. You bring them to this stage. I feel this approach is totally wrong. You want to reaffirm them to help them to increase their self-esteem. It's not doing it when you treat students like that. No student should have to be treated like that; that you are brought in and asked why, what shop did you go to, why did the two of you go to the same shop. The purpose of this whole course is to have people able to work in groups, to able to work as a team and then why, in the name of Heavens, if they are working in a team do you have to say what did you do why have you this or why have you that?

Open Coding based on excerpt of interview with one of Angela's and Peter's teachers.

Category	*Property*	*Dimensions*
Assessing group tasks	group	2 students who had developed over time;
	Report	Prepared jointly on word processor
		Both claimed ownership of entire report
	Individualised work	not identified.
	Sensitivity of Assessor	Gestapo type approach;
		Lack of consultation with teacher;
	Impact on students	diminished self-esteem.
	Impact on teacher	very angry; Confused re conflict between collaboration and individualisation
	awareness of guidelines re external assessment	Low.
	Student self-assessment	Not encouraged
	Emphasis on report	Over-emphasis.
	Opinion of students' work	very high;
	Reaction of Students	self-confidence undermined … diminished

Excerpt from interview with teacher from another school, who had acted as external assessor of cross-curricular tasks on two occasions.

Teacher: *In my experience as an examiner, I have seen examples where group tasks did create difficulties.*

Ó Donnabháin: *So as an examiner you've seen problems?*

Teacher: *I have seen problems with group tasks, yes.*

Ó Donnabháin: *And, what are the problems, and how can they be dealt* with?

Teacher: *The main problem is the lack of a well-defined role for each student. That is a big problem. I have been out twice examining tasks and I've written it in my report each time. The second time I was out, I thought that it would have improved. It was stated in the examiner's report that was sent out to every school - that this was where a lot of group tasks had fallen down in actual fact.*

Ó Donnabháin: *Was there any improvement in the second round?*

Teacher: *No! There was not. If anything possibly it was worse.*

... In my own class I'd be well aware myself from the beginning of each task that every student must be able to stand up and tell me what their job is. The first thing they would do is identify their own role within the group task. And then we do general aims. Then I get them to do 'my own aims'. I don't help them with that because once they know what their role is they should know what they're aiming to do. Then they should know what their plan of action should be.

Open Coding based on excerpt of interview with teacher from another school who had acted as an external assessor.

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessing Group Tasks	Problems	Widespread
	Cause of problems	Lack of well defined role for each member of group
	Confirmation of problems	General Examiner's report circulated to all Leaving Certificate Applied schools
	Effectiveness of General Examiner's report	Ineffective … position deteriorating
	Solution to problem	Clarification of each student's personal role at beginning of group task.

Excerpts from reports of Leaving Certificate Applied Chief Examiner (1996 and 1997):

Candidates also experienced some difficulty in the area of self-evaluation. In a number of instances candidates appraised the completed task or the research results rather than evaluated the quality of their own performance in completing the task. Some equated self-evaluation exclusively with negative self-criticism (Chief Examiner 1996:11).

There was an unevenness in the length of written task reports submitted for assessment. In a small number of cases there was excessive length – up to 40 or 50 pages in some instances. A small number of tasks were decidedly short, a mere one or two pages in length.

Examiners had difficulty in identifying individual candidate contribution to some group tasks. In a number of instances the number of candidates participating in group tasks was too large to allow for a satisfactory contribution from all candidates (Chief Examiner 1996:12).

The failure of many group tasks to address the area of individual candidate contribution persisted as something of a problem. In certain instances candidates did not document fully their own contribution to such tasks. It was also noted by examiners that candidates involved in group tasks sometimes presented a single written group report on the task but neglected to present a separate individual candidate report as required. In the case of some group tasks, examiners had genuine difficulty in identifying individual candidate contribution and involvement (Chief Examiner 1997:14).

Open Coding based on extract from reports of Leaving Certificate Applied Chief Examiner (1996 and 1997).

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
Assessing Group Tasks	Difficulty re self-evaluation	Over-emphasis on completed task … equating self-evaluation with negative self-criticism.
	Length of task reports	Too long … too short
	Problem of identifying individual candidate contribution	Persisting
	Documentation re individual student contribution	Not available in some cases
	Problem with single written report	Difficulty for assessor to identify individual contributions

APPENDIX 7
An Example of Axial Coding

First stage of Axial Coding, Phenomenon and Causal Conditions, based on Open Coding shown in Appendix 6.

Causal Conditions →	*Phenomenon*
External assessors of cross-curricular learning	Assessment of Group Tasks
Properties	*Specific dimensions of assessment*
Protracted negotiations;	Purpose... summative;
Union opposition to teacher-based assessment;	Accreditation... 3 credits maximum per cross-curricular task;
Alternative proposals produced under time restraints	Assessor... practising teacher;
Little consultation	External... not known in school;
Guidelines not specific.	Evidence in form of written report plus interview.
Report of Leaving Certificate Applied Chief Examiner circulated to schools	Individualised assessment of members of groups.
Members of Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service not directly involved in assessment procedures	Single report on group not acceptable unless accompanied by written evidence of individual contribution.

Second stage of axial coding: Contextual Conditions based on Open Coding shown in Appendix 6.

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Assessment of Group Tasks	Size of Group	2 persons 1 male, 1 female
	Joint report	1 document of 56 pps.
	Individual contributions	Not identified
	Sources	CD Rom., books
	Students	Positive... self-confident
		Enjoyment... 'the best task I ever did'
	Teachers' role	Supportive, facilitative, Non-directive.
	Degree of interaction with local community	Considerable, provided prizes for raffle organised as part of task.
		Increased awareness of Human Rights.

Third stage of Axial Coding: Action / Interaction Strategies, based on Open Coding in Appendix 6.

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Strategies used in assessment of group tasks	Assessor	External. Not known in school
	Rigour of assessment	Thorough … coscientious.
	Form of assessment	Look at report … individual interviews.
	Time	Approx 15 mins per student
	Sensitivity of assessor	Affirming … terrible … Gestapo style.
	Group	2 students, 1 male, 1 female.
	Report	In form of one 56 page document prepared on word processor.
	Individual contributions	Not identifiable
	Interviews re one joint task.	3 for boy; 2 for girl.
	Interaction with students	Girl bemused but not expressing any negative feelings. Teachers felt that she was aggravated, but that did not show in her own interview.
		Boy very distressed. Unable to understand why there should be individualised reports on what was a totally shared activity.
	Teacher reaction	Low level of awareness of guidelines re external assessment.
		Confused re self-evaluation of student role in group activity.
		Unhappy … very angry.

Fourth stage of Axial Coding: Intervening Conditions based on Open Coding in Appendix 6.

Category	*Property*	Dimensions
Assessment of group tasks	Principal's views	Difficulty with individualised assessment *'you can't break the singer and the song'.*
	Department of Education & Science Guidelines	Small to no impact on teachers.
	Report of Chief Examiner1996	Ineffective.

Fifth stage of Axial Coding: Consequences, based on Open Coding in Appendix 6.

Category	*Property*	*Dimensions*
Assessment of group tasks	Student self-esteem	diminished;
	student self-confidence	undermined;
	Student motivation	decreased;
	Student feelings	male more upset than female.
	Teacher self-confidence	Shaken.
	Teacher feelings	Unhappy ... very angry;
	Views on student self-evaluation of contribution to group task.	Confused
	Teacher briefing of students re external assessment	not in accordance with Department of Education & Science guidelines;
	Teacher motivation to promote group work	Discouraged very much.

The parallel procedures of *open coding* and *axial coding* illustrated by the example above were repeated many times as the transcripts of the interviews with students and teachers were being analysed. Connections between categories were being continuously revised in the light of ongoing reflection and as a result of checking back repeatedly with the original transcripts.

APPENDIX 8

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (incorporating all relevant data)

CORE CATEGORY AND CAUSAL CONDITIONS

Core Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Facilitating empowerment	Student commitment	enthusiastic...cooperative ...reluctant...alienated;
	School support	effective...accepting... ineffective;
	Outside school influences	positive ... enhancing ...negative ...constraining
Causal Conditions	Cross-curricular tasks	mandatory/ sequential.
		national accreditation;
	Young people	indifferent school histories
		strained relations with teachers;
		poor exam results/low level vocabulary;
		Diversity /age/ intellectual capacity/ self-esteem.
	Teachers involved	suspicious, hostile / enthusiastic, supportive;
	National responsibility	Department of Education / NCCA;
	Funding	State/ E.U.

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Three case study schools	Location	rural / urban;
	Size	365 - 700 students
	Type	secondary/ vocational/ community college/school
	Gender	Single sex/co-educational
		Imbalance in co-educational schools
	staffing	with / without counsellor
	School climate	supportive / not welcoming, tolerating.
	Literacy levels of students	Low … mediocre
	Links with neighbourhood	Casual … networked.
	Student/teacher relations	Fraught … friendly.
	Leadership style	Proactive /facilitative /passive
	Timetable	Flexible / rigid
		Teacher meetings Y/N.
	In-career development	In-school / outside school
	Pedagogical expertise	High … low levels
	Links with neighbourhood	Casual … networked.

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Management of Tasks	Principal	involved / Not involved;
	Co-ordinator	effective / ineffective
		Circulation of documents
		Team meetings /frequency
	Student goals	Stay at school / leave to get job
	Community links	Managed network / haphazard links
Management of Inquiry based Tasks	Topics	negotiated / assigned;
	Level of control	Student/teacher centred
	Sources	Print / people
	Print	Newspapers/books/ CDRom.
	People	Agencies / individuals
		Acquaintances / strangers;
	Planning	Strategic / thoughtless
	Gathering information	letters / phone queries; questionnaires / surveys.

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Management of Inquiry-based tasks	Analysis of data	compare / contrast/ formulate generalisations;
	Preparing reports	oral /written.
Management of Experience-based tasks	Work experience placements	aims clarified/vague;
		Well prepared / Not prepared
		Well monitored / not monitored
		Debriefing thorough/ slipshod
		Student response Positive / negative
	Mini-enterprise	Involvement of local employers
		Simulation of recruitment
		Action plan / journal
		Critical reflection / self-assessment

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Category	Properties	Dimensions
Applying Communications skills to tasks	Oracy	Asking; listening; oral reports; Interviewing; being interviewed/ adult strangers / acquaintances
	Literacy	Read source materials
		Formulate hypotheses
		Compose letters of inquiry
		Design questionnaires
		Summarise findings
		Keep diary events / personal reactions.
		Write out action plans / personal goals.
		Prepare self-assessment
	Information Communications Technology	prepare letters of inquiry / prepare reports; illustrate reports with graphics.
Applying self-organisational skills	Time management	Student/teacher managed; School / part-time job.

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Applying self-organisational skills	Action plan	Student / teacher designed
		Negotiated / assigned
		Followed / ignored
		Diary kept /not kept
		Individual / group
	Selection of source materials	Student / teacher directed
	Asssessment reports	Student responsibility Yes / No
	Community tasks	Personal responsibility, Much / little.
Facilitating integration through tasks	Summarising, synthesising	Descriptive ... more analytical reports
	Problem raising	Relevant to student's life
	Problem solving	More aware of complexity of problem / not aware.
	Forming opinions	Informed / not informed
	Over arching ideas	Aware /not aware
	Assessment	Formative

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

ACTION / INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Collaborative tasks	Communication	Speaking / listening;
	Other views / suggestions	Considering / rejecting;
	Goals	Short-term realistic;
		Person/community centred;
		Agreed / differing;
	Barriers	Friends / others;
		Girls / boys;
	Group size	2 to whole class;
	Teachers	Facilitative / not involved;
	Assessment	Individual / group contributions;
Formative assessment of tasks	Goals	Realistic / over ambitious;
	Feedback	Sensitive / insensitive
		Teachers /other adults;
	Achievements	Acknowledged / ignored
	Summative assessment	Dominating / balanced with formative

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (contd.)

INTERVENING CONDITIONS

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Students	Examination results	Generally indifferent
	Literacy levels	Low … mediocre
	Intellectual capacity	Very mixed
	Economic status	Majority disadvantaged
	Self-esteem	Very wide range
	Gender imbalance	Dominated by males
Culture of schools	Classical humanist tradition	Need for change – OECD
	Technical orientation	Great emphasis
	Competitive individualism	Great emphasis
	Scale of change	Minor … significant
	Timetable	Major constraint
	Teamwork between teachers	Very little
	Evaluation /inspection	Little inspection … written examinations the yardstick.
Uncertainty re LCA	Negotiation re assessment	Deadlock
	Preparatory planning	Inadequate
	Postponement of assessment	Confusion … Anger.
Status of Initial Vocational Education	In comparison to Leaving Certificate	Very low
Number of Tasks	In context of 10 modules	Too many

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (CONTD)

CONSEQUENCES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Enhanced Self-esteem	Confidence	Increased/ diminished
	Relating to peers	Friendly / Distant
	Relating to teachers	Friendly / Hostile
	Relating to other adults	Confident / not confident
	Sense of achievement	Great / Little
Increased Motivation	Stayed at school	Attendance irregular
	Freedom to negotiate	Topics, assigned / negotiated.
	Work experience	Career information / contact with employers
	Assessment	Pleased / Displeased
	Personal responsibility	Involved / apathetic
	Reaction to strike in Department of Education	Upset / indifferent
	Media reports	Encouraging/discouraging
	Public perceptions	Negative, ill-informed.

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (CONTD)

CONSEQUENCES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Improved Communications skills	Oracy	Articulate / inarticulate
	Reading	Low / Middle levels
	Information Technology	Basic competence, Y/N.
	Design questionnaire	Capable / not capable
	Interpret results	Capable / not capable
Improved Self-organisational skills	Work on one's own	With /without direction
	Action plan	Develop own plan / implement teacher's plan
	Time management	Concurrent /staggered deadlines
	Career explorations	Coherent /confused
Increased capability to think more critically	Formulation of hypotheses	Facilitated / not facilitated
	Testing hypotheses	Facilitated / not facilitated
	Building own ideas into tasks	Encouraged / not encouraged
	Introduced to instruments for collection of data	Systematically / in a haphazard manner
	Analysis of data	Opportunity to practise analysis, given/not given

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (CONTD)

CONSEQUENCES

Category	*Property*	*Dimension*
	Summarising	Formative assessment of summaries, Yes/No
	Personal reflections	Shared / not shared
	Forming generalisations	Discussed / written up
	Linking tasks to modules	Superficial / integrated
Increased capacity for team work	All tasks	Team spirit of class, increased/decreased
	Work as member of group	Wholeheartedly / reluctantly
	Role	Taking / sharing leadership
		Accepting others as leaders
	Group tasks	Size of group, Large /small
		Enjoyable for students /for teachers
	Reluctance of teachers to organise group tasks	Increased volatility in classroom
		Reduced teacher control
		Going outside teacher's own subject area
		Keeping everyone busy in large group
		External assessments / individual contributions

SELECTIVE CODING: LOGIC DIAGRAM (CONTD.)

CONSEQUENCES

Category	*Properties*	*Dimensions*
Increased employability	Contribution of task	Survey positive
	Tasks relating directly to world of work	Career explorations, work experience, mini-enterprise
	Work experience	Monitored, Yes/No
		Skill levels of workplaces, Low / middle level
		Debriefing, superficial
		Students, very positive
	Mini-enterprise	Role play job application
		Sense of satisfaction
		Consultants, role models
	Part time jobs	Ignored
Greater sense of community	Supports	Parents, employers, organisations, volunteers
	Network of supports	Managed / not managed
	Employers	Work experience places
		Advisors re mini-enterprise
	Voluntary organisations	Community work
	Public libraries	Used / not used
	Student awareness of community role	Increased /not increased

APPENDIX 9

Photocopy of Department of Education Circular S. 73/95

Roinn Oideachais
Brainse na Scrúduithe
Baile Átha Luain

Fón (Telephone) (0902) 74621

Department of Education
Examinations Branch
Athlone

Fax (0902) 78562

To: To the Boards of Management/Authorities of Second-level schools offering the Leaving Certificate Applied

Circular Letter S. 73/95

Arrangements for Certification of the Leaving Certificate Applied 1995 - 1997.

1. Introduction.

1.1 Circular Letter M3/95 set out the arrangements for the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied. As schools will be aware the Leaving Certificate Applied is a single award made on the basis of credits accumulated over 4 sessions and in the terminal examination. A total of 100 credits may be accumulated.

1.2 Students who successfully complete the Leaving Certificate Applied will receive the Leaving Certificate of the Department of Education. The Leaving Certificate Applied will be awarded at 3 levels

Pass	60 credits
Merit	70 credits
Distinction	85 credits

1.3 Student achievement and performance in the Leaving Certificate Applied will be recorded in 3 modes:

- satisfactory completion of modules:- 40 credits,
- performance of student tasks:- 27 credits,
- performance in a terminal examination:- 33 credits.

2. Satisfactory Completion of Modules

2.1 At the end of each session the student will be credited on satisfactory completion of the appropriate modules.

2.2 In order to be awarded credit, students must complete each module by:

(i) attending the classes and out-of-school activities related to the module
and

(ii) completing the Key Assignments related to the module. No ranking or assessment of performance will be involved.

2.3 A minimum attendance of 90% is expected. Where there is absence due to exceptional circumstances, this should be verified by the school.

2.4 A **Record of Evidence** of completion of the Key Assignments relating to all modules should be maintained by each student. The Record of Evidence may take the form of a portfolio or a folder, etc. It will include a checklist of Key Assignments for each module. This Record should be retained by the school and be available in the school for inspection until the end of September.

2.5 The student will be involved in the certification of the completion of modules:

(i) by being informed as to what is required for certification;

(ii) by being made aware, in sufficient time, when these requirements are not likely to be met;

(iii) through negotiation concerning completion of outstanding assignment work, if deadline for such assignments are not being met;

(iv) by completing the checklist of Key Assignments attaching to the record of evidence.

2.6 Forms for recording satisfactory completion of modules for the first session will be supplied t the school in January, 1996.

3. Assessment of Student Tasks

3.1 Examiners will require evidence of task performance. This may be in a variety of formats - written, audio, video, artefact, etc. Each student is also required to produce a report on the process of completing the task. This report may be incorporated in the evidence of task performance.

3.2 The Tasks will be assessed by external examiners appointed by the Department of Education The examiners will visit the school during the week beginning 19 February, 1996 (at the end of the first session) and during the week beginning 27 May, 1996 (at the end of the second session). Insofar as is practicable, it is envisaged that assessment of the different categories c Student Tasks will take place in schools at the same time.

3.3 The work of the external examiners will be monitored by advising examiners. Examiners an advising examiners will receive detailed briefing.

3.4 All preparatory work relating to the assessment Student Tasks will be the responsibility of t students themselves. Students will also be required to meet the examiners on the day of assessment of the Tasks.

3.5 As part of the assessment process, each student will present the work involved in the Task a discuss it with the Examiner. In the case of a Group Task, each student will explain her/his personal involvement in the work.

3.6 It will be open to relevant teachers, should they wish, to meet briefly with the examiners o the day of Student Task assessment. Such a meeting should be arranged, through the schoo Principal or Deputy, on the day when the examiner contacts the school to arrange the visit.

The purpose of any such brief meeting might be to inform the examiner of any particular circumstances relating to individual students. **It is emphasised that at no time will examiners discuss their allocation of marks to Student Tasks.**

3.7 Following assessment, the completed student tasks should, in order to allow for appeals, be retained in a safe place in the school until the end of September each year.

4. Terminal Examinations

4.1 Terminal examinations will be provided in the following areas:

* English and Communication
* Vocational Specialisms (2)
* Mathematical Applications
* Language (Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and Modern European Languages)
* Social Education.

4.2 Terminal examinations will be provided at the end of Year 1 in Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and in the Modern European Languages for students who have completed any of these courses in Year 1. These examinations will also be provided at the end of Year 2 for those completing the courses in Year 2.

4.3. Terminal examinations in all other areas will be provided at the end of Year 2.

4.4 The written examinations will, wherever feasible, be held in the same period as the other Leaving Certificate examinations. In 1996 written examinations will be held only for students completing their courses in Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and in Modern European Languages. The detailed timetable for Leaving Certificate Applied written examinations in 1996 will be issued to schools in January, 1996.

4.5 Oral examinations, as well as written/aural examinations, will be held in the case of all the languages including English and Communication.

4.6 In 1996, oral examinations will be held only for students who have completed their courses in Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and in Modern European Languages. These examinations will be held during the week commencing 27 May, 1996.

4.7 Sample examination papers in Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and in the Modern European Languages will be issued to schools in March, 1996. In all other cases, they will be issued in October, 1996. These sample papers will be based on a bank of specimen questions.

4.8 Further details concerning the arrangements for examinations will be issued to schools shortly

5. General

5.1 Notification of Satisfactory Completion of Modules will be issued by the Department at the same time as the results of the assessment of Student Tasks.

5.2 As stated in Circular Letter M3/95, para 1.1, development of the Leaving Certificate Applied will take place during the two-year period 1995 to 1997, in association with the participating schools. The modes and methods of determining student achievement and performance will be developed during this period as a part of this process.

5.3 In the Programme Statement for Leaving Certificate Applied, provision is indicated for schools to develop their own modules/vocational specialisms. Schools wishing to do so are required to submit these modules/specialisms for validation by the Department of Education and NCCA prior to their implementation. Assessment provision will be on the basis of validated modules only.

6. Appeals Procedure

6.1 An appropriate Appeals Procedure will be put in place for **all** assessment components. All appeals must be made - through the school - to the Department of Education within a period o **two weeks** following issue of the result to the candidate.

6.2 In the case of certification of Satisfactory Completion of Modules, the appeal will be adjudicated by the Inspectorate; the Record of Evidence will be an important factor in decidin such an appeal.

6.3 In the case of the Student Tasks and of the written examinations, the student's work will be re marked by an examiner appointed by the Department.

7. Helpline Service

Any assistance/clarification that schools or teachers require in regard to the content of this circular will be provided by the following contact persons :-

- **Mr. Neil Bray, Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, Co. Clare - Telephone: 061-361993 or Fax: 061-361151 and**

- **Ms. Marie Rooney, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, Sundrive Road, Dublin 12 - Telephone: (01) 4535487 or Fax: (01) 4537659.**

As schools are aware, the Helpline service may be contacted to:
- obtain up-to-date factual information;
- seek appropriate advice on difficulties being experienced;
- report particular activities that resulted in very positive outcomes.

8. Dissemination of Information

School authorities are requested to provide a copy of this circular to the parents' and teachers' representatives on the Board of Management, where such exists, and to the parents' association / National Parents Council representatives or other appropriate representatives of the parents/teachers for transmission to individual parents and teachers.

Don Thornhill
Secretary
7 December, 1995

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